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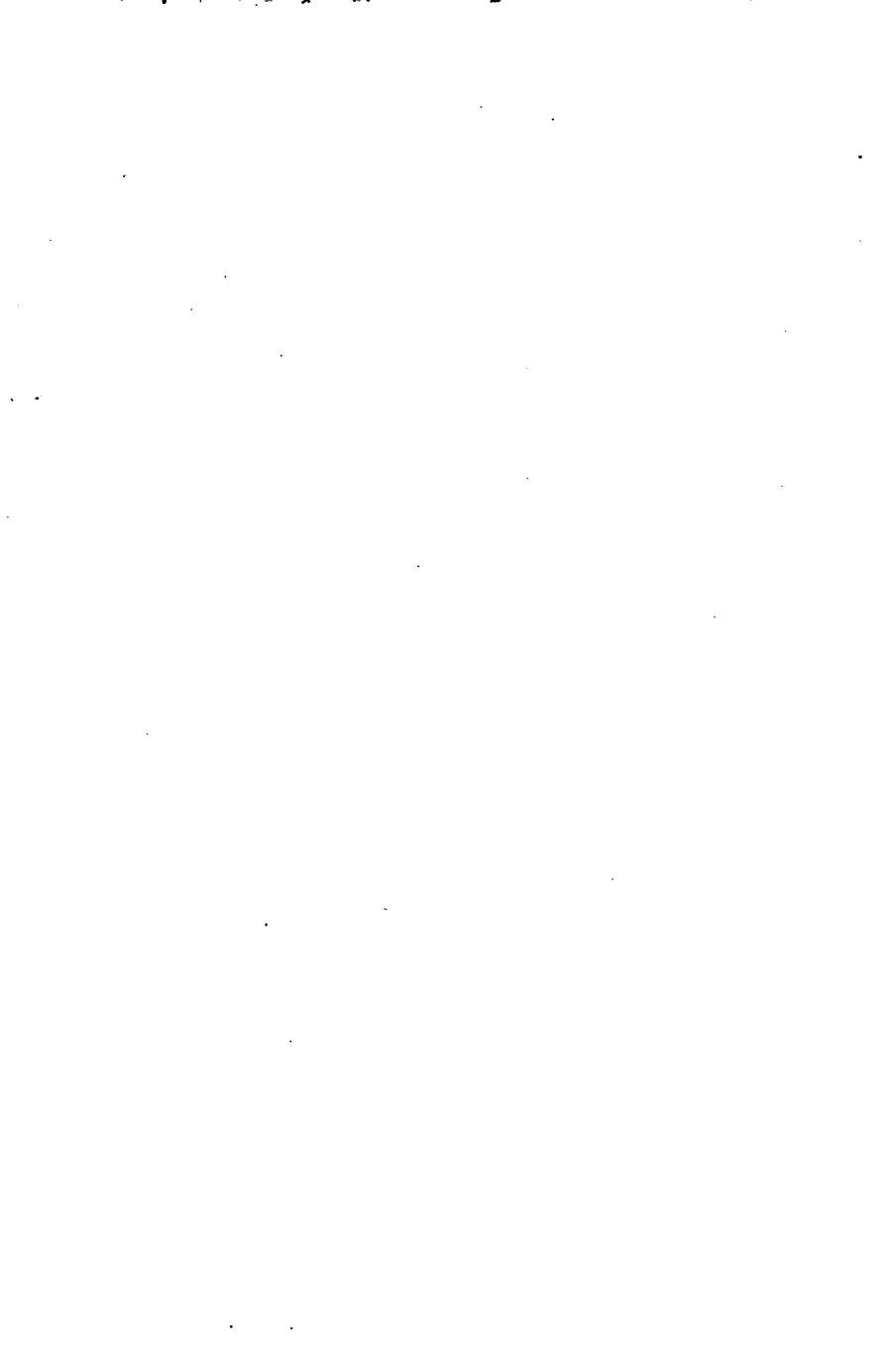
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# A DOG WITH A BAD NAME.



# A DOG WITH A BAD NAME.

BY

FLORENCE WARDEN,

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“THE HOUSE ON THE MARSH” AND “AT THE WORLD’S MERCY.”

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

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# A DOG WITH A BAD NAME.



## CHAPTER I.

As Geraldine returned from her exciting visit to Chiswick and tried to come to some clear conclusion upon the strange manner in which she had discovered James Otway, and the suspicious circumstances by which he was surrounded, her fears for him, growing stronger every moment, at last overcame her self-control so entirely that, upon arriving at the hotel where she and Miss Elizabeth were staying, she was quite unprepared with any reasonable excuse for her long absence, and ran up to her room with only the briefest and scantiest attempt at an explanation. Fortunately, as she thought, the elder lady did not press her

on the subject, and did not tease her at dinner by comments on her evident depression. Mrs. Morrison retired early—not to sleep, but to torture herself again on account of James.

Next morning she professed to be too tired to go to the riding-school, and at three o'clock she again slipped out of the hotel and got into a hansom. She caught a fast train, which, leaving Waterloo at 3.25, arrived at 3.47 at Chiswick, so that she reached Bankside Cottages a few minutes before four.

On the previous day she had been nervous, anxious, uncertain as to the result of her journey, doubtful as to the wisdom of her undertaking it, and she had been on the alert from the very moment of starting until her arrival at her destination, lest some spy should have been set to dog her footsteps; but to-day her excitement was far too intense for her to be able either to watch or listen. In the cab, in the train, on foot, on her way to the river-side, she was absorbed, to the exclusion of every other thought and feeling, by a feverish longing to see James again, to assure herself that he was still safe. When she reached

Bankside Cottages, and stopped with her hand upon the gate of No. 5, a late spirit of precaution, more instinctive than voluntary, made her glance back along the road by which she had come ; and, as she did so, her hand fell down, and a great trembling seized her from head to foot, for, just coming in sight round the corner of the road which led from the station, she saw the short slight figure, more terrible to her than that of giant or ogre could have been, of her husband.

For one moment she stood still, unable to move ; then, glancing at the house again, she passed on to the next, and stopped before it and examined it as if in uncertainty. This manœuvre she repeated before half a dozen houses, and at the sixth she came to, which was No. 10, she opened the gate and walked boldly up to the door. Having knocked as loudly and imperatively as she could, being anxious to get the interview with the person who should open the door over before her husband could come up, in a few moments she heard a shuffling footstep in the passage, and an old man in slippers, without his coat,

opened the door slowly and looked round it to answer her.

"Does Mrs. Thompson live here?" asked Geraldine, in terror lest she should be answered in the affirmative. It was the first name that came into her head, and she dared not hesitate in order to find a better one.

"No," said the man, gruffly. "There's a Mrs. Tomkins lives round the corner, next door but one to the Blue Lion."

"Oh, thank you!" said Geraldine, retreating joyfully.

The man seemed to think her extravagant satisfaction suspicious, especially as she walked on, instead of returning towards the station in the direction he had indicated—for she did not wish to face her husband just yet; she proposed to lead him on a wild-goose chase to take him off the scent, and in the mean time to prepare a story which should allay his suspicions. Unluckily, however, Captain Morrison's essays as an amateur detective, with which she had taunted him, had made his sight keen and his judgment cool. As, under pretence of examining the exterior of another house, she let her

eyes take in the road along which she had come, she saw her husband entering a gate. Looking round, now wholly startled, she found that it was that of No. 5.

She flew back along the rough pavement, calling to him without ceremony as soon as she was near enough, apparently in great surprise. He pretended not to hear her until he was at the foot of the steps, when, unable any longer to plead deafness, he turned impatiently, and, as she still ran on towards him, walked back to the gate and waited for her. The expression of his dark face appalled her; but she had not expected pleasant looks, and she did not let his frowns check the somewhat spasmodic smile with which she greeted him.

"You here, Philip! I can scarcely believe my eyes! What are you doing in this part of the world?"

"I have come here to make a business call," said he, quietly. "And you?"

"I came down to see a poor relation of mine; but I cannot find her."

"Indeed! I did not know that you knew of any poor relations."

"I call the relations of the Otways mine."

"So you came down here to see a female poor relation of the Otways? Well, go on with your search, my dear; and then, I think, when you have found her, or satisfied yourself that she no longer lives here, you had better find your way back to the station."

"I have satisfied myself that she doesn't live here; I have asked everywhere; so I can go back now, if you are ready."

"I have told you I have an appointment. Go back to the station and wait for me; I shall not be long."

The light died out of her eyes as they met the steady, remorseless fire of his. Before he knew what she was going to do, she had pushed the gate and slipped in beside him.

"Who is your appointment with, Philip?" she asked, in a very low voice, and white to the lips.

"It is with a gentleman—on business, as I have told you. Now go to the station, and I will join you in a few minutes."

"I will not go till you have told me what your business is, and with whom it is."

His face grew livid ; but he remained perfectly quiet as he put a strong hand on her arm, and attempted to lead her towards the gate.

“Philip,” said she, shaking from head to foot, but with a will as firm as his own shining in her eyes, “I will not leave this place without you. I am not strong enough to prevent your putting me outside the gate, if you chose to use your muscular force against me ; but, if you attempt to enter this house without me, I will scream and shriek and bring the whole neighbourhood about your ears. That man standing at his door in his shirt-sleeves will be one of the first to come—I think, if you wish to commit murder, you would not chose to have it accompanied by quite so many vulgar details as such a scene would entail.”

She had felt, as he seized her arm, something hard in the inside pocket of his overcoat, and at once guessed that it was a revolver. Rather than let him enter the house where James was with that in his possession she would, at this moment of fierce exaltation, have shot her husband dead herself with it. Captain Morrison was not likely to misread the ex-

pression of a spirit so like his own. One flash of fury from his eyes, one gleam of his white teeth as his lips parted with a sharp hiss, and then he met her defiance with an easy coolness which disarmed and frightened her.

“Very well; you must have your own way, I suppose. I hope you will have the justice to hold me blameless of the consequences. It is always a pity when ladies will interfere in matters of business.”

And he walked quickly along the path and up the steps, and knocked at the door. Geraldine followed in terror which rendered her dumb. As soon as Mrs. Hicks appeared, he stepped in past her. As he was speaking to her, his wife darted into the passage and into the room on the right, slammed the door, and turned the key. She saw the dozing figure in the armchair again; but without one word, without a second's pause, she rushed into the back room and locked the door of that before she turned to him. When she faced him, he had started up from his chair, too utterly surprised to speak.

“Quick, the window!” she whispered, point-



ing to the back as she re-entered the dark front room. There came a thud against the door of the room. She started forward to force the inert James into action, when, just as the lock yielded to the pressure put upon it, and the door flew suddenly open, Geraldine, with a loud cry, fell back against the folding-doors and burst into hysterical laughter. The calm gentleman, who had turned from watching the frantic vagaries of his lady-visitor to make a courteous bow to her husband on the somewhat abrupt entrance of the latter, was not James at all, but the portly Lindley Fielding.

Glancing from his overwrought and now sobbing wife to the bland middle-aged gentleman who advanced and flung back the folding-doors in order to let all the light possible upon the mysterious scene, the savage little officer saw that a mistake had been made. Indeed, Lindley would have been somewhat annoyed could he have known how promptly Captain Morrison came to the conclusion that this was not the man who had supplanted his sister's husband.

“To what may I attribute the pleasure of

this visit?" asked the smiling Lindley, who had been prepared for Geraldine's coming, but not for that of her husband, and who indulged a flattering hope that it was jealousy of himself which had brought him. Lindley was not physically a coward, and he was quite prepared to face any perils which his fascinations might have brought upon him in a dauntless and heroic manner.

The answer dashed his hopes to the ground.

"I must apologize for this melodramatic intrusion," said Captain Morrison, very coldly, annoyed beyond measure with his wife for having made him look like a fool. "I have been the victim of a mistake, and I can only repeat that I—I offer you my most sincere apology."

"Pray don't mention it. I can only congratulate myself upon an accident which has given me the opportunity of making the acquaintance of Captain Morrison."

The other looked up in surprise.

"The late Sir Charles Otway was a cousin of mine," explained Lindley, "and I have had

the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Morrison, when she was still Miss Lindley, at Waringham Hall." He spoke with a fatuous affectation of reserve which neither husband nor wife even noticed.

Geraldine was anxious to bring the interview to an end, lest her husband might learn something from this untrustworthy envoy; for that Lindley had been placed here to await her own arrival, with some communication for her, she could not doubt. But on discovering that this bland person was a relation of the Otways, Captain Morrison had his suspicions re-awakened, and became quite as eager as his wife for a private conversation with him. Perceiving this, poor Lindley found himself in a pitiable dilemma—on the one hand, it was a principle of his to be on good terms with rich men who could receive him into their houses, and he was especially anxious to be on good terms with the tenant of Waringham Hall; on the other, he had something very important to say to Geraldine. Husband and wife both knew that neither would leave without the other; so at last Captain Morrison, impatient at this useless delay, said he must return to

town by the 4.38 train. But, before he went, he gave Mr. Fielding a pressing invitation to Waringham, and it was arranged that the latter should arrive at the Hall on the following Wednesday, to spend the rest of the week there. Geraldine added cordial and most sincere entreaties, and then reluctantly went away with her husband, who kept vigilant watch upon her, so that she could not exchange a word with Lindley, unheard by him, until they were out of the house, when suddenly crying—

“Oh, my purse!” she turned, and ran back up the steps to the door where the middle-aged Adonis was still blandly smiling.

“Is he safe?” she asked breathlessly, in a low voice.

The smile and the colour left his face together.

“I—I hope so. Yes, I think so,” said he, with evident nervousness.

“Is he here?”

“No.”

It was lucky that Lindley could give this answer, for both that and the question which

had called it forth were overheard by Captain Morrison, who had swiftly returned on the track of his wife. She let herself be led away without resistance, with a hopeless expression in her eyes, which pained while it exasperated him. They travelled back to town together almost in silence. The only voluntary attempt at conversation which Geraldine made was when she asked suddenly, while they were in the train—

“It was Miss Elizabeth whom you employed as a spy upon me, I suppose?”

Her husband put down the paper he was pretending to read, and answered shortly—

“There was no need to employ any one else to do ‘my favourite work!’”

Both speeches were the lowest of whispers, growled across the railway carriage, in the farther corners of which a middle-aged couple, long past the bickering period, dozed and ruminated placidly.

Dinner that evening at the hotel was not at all a pleasant meal. Geraldine looked upon her husband and the steely-eyed old lady as her gaolers, and fancied she detected looks of intelligence between them. She left the con-

versation, which was neither brisk nor lively, entirely in their hands, and when her husband asked her if she wished to take any more riding-lessons, she replied briefly that she had given up all thought of taking any, and could return to Waringham as soon as he pleased. Therefore, it was settled that they should go back to the Hall on Monday.

The next day being Sunday, Miss Elizabeth expressed a wish to go to Westminster Abbey, and Captain Morrison offered to take her, asking his wife if she would go too.

"I must, I suppose," said Geraldine, with submission which had now a new element of irritation in it. "For you will certainly not let me remain here without any guard at all; and you have not yet succeeded in pressing Aurélie into your secret service, I think."

This soothing speech was delivered in an undertone at the window, to which her husband had followed her as she rose from the luncheon table.

"When a man has no firmer footing in his wife's heart than I have in yours, Geraldine, he cannot afford to assume airs of security."

"Do you expect to make your footing firmer by treating me like a slave?" Her voice was petulant and trembling, her beautiful eyes were growing dim.

If they had been less beautiful, perhaps Captain Morrison would have treated this rather unreasonable outbreak less leniently. As it was, the little dark-faced man was eaten up by a yearning to take her into his arms and forgive her—which was quite the last thing she would have desired.

"You seem to forget you have just deceived me, Geraldine," said he, raising his eyes askance to her face in an unconsciously plaintive manner.

"I don't forget it," said she defiantly. "Your marrying me was such a great and terrible deception that it would outweigh any amount of deceit I might practise against you."

He raised his eyebrows at this alarming declaration.

"If you were really to believe that, and act upon it, our life could hardly fail to be unhappy," said he, quietly.

"I don't care if it is!"

"But I do, and so will you—some day. You say my marrying you was a deception: that is not quite correct, for I certainly became, legally, your husband, and that, with the responsibilities towards you yourself which it involved, was all I undertook to do."

"You married me for a hateful, inhuman reason."

"But if the human reason has grown up since, what does that matter?"

"It matters a great deal to me. When you found I would not tell you what you wanted to know, you neglected me. It is only since I have begun to hate you that this affection of yours has sprung up."

She was looking out of the window, her cheeks now wet with tears, in utter disregard of him, and the effect her words might have upon him. He stepped back from her as if he had received a blow, and the passionate longing in his eyes gave place to a more dangerous look, which she noticed as little. She was behaving badly, cruelly, and she half knew it; but her misery made her reckless, and she chose, wrong-headedly, to fancy that



she owed no duty at all to the man who had married her with a revengeful intention, ignoring the fact that he had offered to forego it on one simple condition.

"Do you want me to hate you?" he asked in a low voice, which made her shudder.

"Yes," said she, now sobbing outright. "Then you will understand my feelings better."

If she had not looked upon him as a wicked man to whom suffering, if he could feel such a thing, came but as a just punishment of his iniquities, she might have relented when he walked away without another word; she might have guessed that even one's duty to one's neighbour required that such a speech as she had just made should be a little softened down. She did give a glance at the door when she saw that he was going out, and making a step in that direction she said, faintly, "Philip!" But he took no notice; and, of course, if he chose to be sulky instead of waiting to be half-heartedly apologized to, it was not her fault. And her thoughts flew back to her anxiety about James; and she spent the afternoon in miserable conjectures

as to what had become of him, and in passionate impatience for Lindley's visit to the Hall on Wednesday, when she hoped to be able to find out from him what he had meant by that terribly evasive reply to her question as to James's safety.

When she met her husband again, at dinner-time, she felt, without at first troubling herself much as to the reason, that there was a change in him. It did not seem to be of a very ominous kind, but he was more talkative, he watched her less, he drank more wine than usual. The alteration in his conduct grew more marked next day, when, after putting both ladies into a carriage at Liverpool Street Station, on their way back to Norfolk, he left them to themselves, on the plea that he wanted to smoke. Geraldine gave a sigh of relief: was he going to leave her to herself at last?

It seemed so; for on that day and the day following their return she saw less of him than she had ever seen since their marriage. In the early days of the honeymoon she had had his indifferent presence; since her assumption

of independence she had endured his morose but attentive presence; now she scarcely had to suffer his presence at all. She could not help being glad of the change; and, though her conscience felt uneasy, her mind was too full of Lindley's expected visit for her to have much thought to spare upon any other subject. But on the morning of the day upon which he was to arrive, she received an unexpected blow.

A letter from him was waiting for her when she came down to breakfast, containing the surprising announcement that unforeseen pressure of business compelled him to postpone the pleasure of a visit to Waringham, and begging her to convey his sincere regrets to Captain Morrison. This first part of the letter she read aloud. Then came the portion which interested her—

“I quite forgot, under the exciting circumstances of the visit with which you and Captain Morrison honoured me on Saturday, to mention the fact that our common friend, who occupied the rooms at Bankside Cottages before me, has left England for the sake of

his health, under the care of a medical man in whom the highest confidence may be placed. The manner of your question on Saturday took me so much by surprise that I fear I alarmed you unnecessarily by my reply; all that I meant to imply by my hesitating speech, which seemed to inspire you with so much terror, was that our friend, although not absolutely in bad health, has still, through unfortunate circumstances in his career to which we need not more clearly refer, undermined his constitution in such a manner that the constant attention of an experienced physician is the best guarantee we can have for the maintenance of his strength and for his gradual complete restoration. I believe you saw him last Friday, on which occasion you cannot fail to have been struck by the change in him, due, I am sorry to say, for it is better to speak plainly, more to his obstinate treatment of his maladies by stimulants and narcotics than to the maladies themselves. You can understand that such a patient, enfeebled in mind as well as body by such an injudicious course of conduct, requires great tact as well as skill in his medical

attendant ; he is fortunate, however, in having attracted the disinterested and unwearied attention of a distinguished physician, to whom it is but justice to say that our injudicious young friend has become so much attached that the best results are to be hoped for from his trip on the Continent under such happy auspices."

The letter contained nothing more that was of interest to Geraldine, who read it to the end and put it calmly into her pocket, believing her conduct to be quite unsuspecting, for she did not know that her face had become so ghastly white that it was patent to the two keen watchers at the table—Eleanor never came down to breakfast—that she had suffered some great shock. Still confident, and singing as she went to disarm suspicion should it have arisen, she went into the drawing-room after breakfast to fulfil her first morning task of examining the flowers ; but no sooner was she alone, shut in the big cold room where nobody was likely to disturb her, than she sank down on a chair beside the little table which generally had her first care, and laid her head on her

hands beside the bowl of camellias and ferns which her overflowing eyes could not see.

"And I can do nothing—nothing!" she sobbed to herself, just above her breath; and then she sprang up with a start, and dried her eyes, and upset the bowl of flowers in nervous haste to be busy, as she heard some one open the door. Her heart sank as she recognized her husband's step without looking round. He stopped before he had come very near her.

"I wish to see that letter, Geraldine."

Her hands became suddenly still; she did not ask what letter he meant this time. Finding her way to her pocket with fingers that shook so much that for some moments they were literally unable to feel the folds of her gown, she brought out at last, with both hands, everything her pocket contained, and held all submissively towards him. Her terror, as she stood before him, shaking like a leaf, was pitiable to see. It infuriated him.

"Give me the letter! I only want the letter!"

"Take it, please; I can't see."

It was true ; the tears were falling fast from her eyes and blinding her. He snatched the letter he wanted, and she sank down again on the chair beside the table, and waited. While he was reading, she had time to collect her thoughts. The letter, she knew, could not put him on the track of James, and, though it told him that Lindley Fielding could do so, he had certainly guessed that already ; but it could not fail to make his watch over herself closer, and so hamper whatever efforts she could make on James's behalf. The few moments of anxious waiting while her husband read the letter in silence were agonizing ; the worst was over as soon as he spoke, and she could answer him.

"So this is the drunken blackguard whom you will lie and trick your husband and risk your reputation to go and see !"

This angry opening braced Geraldine to the conflict, and she answered quietly and most unexpectedly—

"Yes."

"You have singular taste."

"Taste ! No. No man could be less to

my taste than the man I deceived you to go and see the other day."

"Then the pleasure of the expedition lay in the fact that it was against my wishes?"

"There was no pleasure in it. I went to learn whether he was safe; I did not even expect to see him."

"But you expected to see him when I met you. You knew he was safe then; your second visit only put him in danger."

She had no answer for that; she hardly knew herself why she had been so rashly, madly anxious to see him again.

"You love him; it is of no use for you to deny it."

"I don't deny it. I love him just as you love the sister who has brought shame to your family. To see him, as I saw him on Friday, ill, sleepy, stupid, scarcely able to understand or answer me, makes me love him neither more nor less. If I saw him for the first time now, I should be disgusted; but he used to be kind to me, and I can never forget it."

She finished her speech very quickly, afraid of her voice giving way.



"Most touching loyalty in a woman who is perpetually deceiving her husband!"

"I shouldn't deceive you, if you were human. But when you have declared that your chief purpose in life is to hunt down a man who is already persecuted and driven and ruined, it is no wonder I take his part against you. Oh, Philip, he is broken down and ill! Are you not satisfied?"

If she could have asked him this question with her arms round his neck, he would have been able to answer with truth that he was; and that what had been his chief purpose in life two months ago was so no longer. But she sat before him, hard and bitter in her misery, speaking earnestly indeed, but with the despairing earnestness of one who strives to make an impression upon a feared and hated tyrant or taskmaster. Neither revenge nor jealousy could be conquered like that; and he answered with an outbreak of passion.

"No; I am not satisfied. If I believed you, perhaps I might be; but a woman who deceives her husband flagrantly twice in the course of a

week is not to be trusted. How am I to know that this letter was not concocted between you and the man I saw on Saturday, on purpose to mislead me, to work upon my pity for a wretch who ought to be outside the pale of your sympathy—a murderer, a seducer, a helpless, hopeless drunkard?”

Geraldine could not bear this. She started up, as angry as he.

“Believe what you like! Believe that we are all three in a vile conspiracy against you; then you can abuse us all together, accuse us all together, and get rid of us all together! Nothing short of that will content you—or me!” And she fled along the room to the door, and left him.

Later in the morning, Geraldine heard her husband giving orders for the phaeton to be brought round, and she felt rather frightened when, half an hour afterwards, she saw him driving down towards the lodge, with his own man at the back beside the groom. She was in the conservatory, and she opened the outer door to watch, wondering what this meant. Then she heard a step behind her, and, turn-

ing, found the old butler, with his eyes gravely bent on the salver in his hand.

"The captain desired me to give you this, ma'am, as soon as he was gone."

Geraldine took the note, and stood playing with it for some minutes before she opened it. That its contents were of momentous interest she was sure—that it was a farewell she guessed. The phaeton was out of sight before she read it.

"DEAR GERALDINE,

"I have done what you have at last confessed, after implying it a long time, is the only thing to content you—I have rid you of my presence. It is not my fault that I have not been able to please you in any other way. You are always taunting me with my motive in marrying you, and declaring that I sacrificed you in my wish for revenge. Has it ever occurred to you to analyze your own motives for marrying me? If you will do so, I think you will find that you were moved by pique, or *ennui*, or some other feeling quite unconnected with me and my personal qualities;

otherwise your indifference would never have turned to dislike so easily—I repeat so easily, for the discovery of my intentions towards the man who had brought dishonour upon my family would have led a dutiful wife to entreaty, but not to rebellion. I admire high spirit, luckily for you, for it has led me to put up with conduct which few husbands would have endured for a day; but you have gone too far. It is beneath my dignity to quarrel with you; I simply leave you to yourself. I can amuse myself better in town than in the society of a woman who makes none of the efforts a wife is bound to make to please her husband. You can say I have gone hunting, as I shall probably run down to Melton to finish the week's enjoyment from which your vagaries called me back. You are mistaken in thinking I am jealous; I should not condescend to be jealous of the contemptible hound whom you might have saved, if you had chosen, from the consequences of my oath, which I am now free to fulfil—which I will fulfil! What the result to myself may be I do not care; it will be more interesting to you, as

I believe you would thank the gallows for ridding you of your husband,

“PHILIP GORDON MORRISON.

“P.S.—You can address to the Charing Cross Hotel, if I am wanted.”

Geraldine read this letter, and shuddered at the menace it contained to James; but she had not enough sympathy with the writer to read between the lines, to understand the pain which made the proud man inconsistent, to guess at the yearning which prompted the bathos of the postscript. The little sting of conscience which that question as to her motives in marrying caused her for the first time was forgotten before she had read the letter to the end.

She could not bear her miserable anxiety in inaction, but went to her room, refused the services of sympathetic, curious Aurélie, and, dressing hastily, escaped out of the house to find relief in a long walk. She saw Elizabeth watching her departure from one of the drawing-room windows, and, on her return, discovered that lady's sharp eyes fixed upon her over the

hedge and wire fence which shut in the park on the east side. The suspicion that this espionage was not accidental rose in Geraldine's mind, and was confirmed before the day was over ; for Elizabeth, having expressed a wish to accompany her in her usual drive, was evidently disconcerted when Geraldine, at the last moment, drew back on the plea of headache. And, when the elder lady brought back the letters from the Goldborough post-office, she re-directed those for Captain Morrison without having to ask his wife for his address. So Geraldine asked the old butler whether his master had left a note for Miss Elizabeth as well as for herself.

"No, ma'am. The captain was with Miss Elizabeth in the study for about half an hour just before he started," replied Johnson, delighted to have this opportunity of putting his young mistress on her guard against the household bogey, whom he considered to be in league with the unpopular master against her.

Then Geraldine was satisfied ; and she returned to the drawing-room bright eyed, animated, her depression of the morning quite

gone. For, as a relief from the hopeless, helpless despair about James which had paralyzed her, she had now the stimulating feeling that she was being watched, that the tiger had withdrawn in order to make a better spring : and the wicked spirit of the baby-waif, which the Misses Gretton had worked so hard to crush, rose up in the young wife as she clenched her teeth and told herself that, if that elderly lady with the hasp-like mouth and steely blue eyes really had undertaken the task of mounting guard over her, she should find the occupation more onerous than she had expected.

## CHAPTER II.

IN pursuance of her mischievous intention of defeating the vigilance of her custodian, Geraldine ordered the carriage early on the following morning, and drove some distance before she got out, sent it home, and returned herself on foot. This piece of devilry produced the result she desired. Elizabeth was evidently disturbed, and her anxiety was increased when Mrs. Morrison said that the barouche would be at the disposal of the elder ladies in the afternoon, as she wanted Aurélie with her in the brougham.

"Do you think Captain Morrison would approve of your going about in this manner with no one but a silly little maid?" Elizabeth asked, with very tightly drawn lips, at luncheon.

"Oh, if he finds anything to disapprove of



in the report of my conduct, he can come back and look after me himself, Aunt Elizabeth," she answered sweetly, but with a meaning perfectly clear.

And the elder lady did not continue the subject.

So Geraldine went off again after luncheon, and spent the afternoon at Goldborough, in shopping and among the books at the public library. She succeeded in tiring herself out so thoroughly by excitement and restless activity that, on her return, she was glad to lie back in the carriage with closed eyes ; and, when she arrived at the Hall, her head ached so badly that she lay down on her bed, and sent Aurélie to Miss Eleanor for her celebrated lotion, a request for which always pleased the old lady. It was some time before the maid returned, and, when she did so, she was in a state of great excitement, and could only speak in mysterious hissing whispers, which irritated her mistress beyond endurance.

"What is it, Aurélie ? Don't whisper like that. If you have anything to say, do say it aloud."

"Ah, mais madame est souffrante—Je n'ose pas——"

"Go on, go on! What is it?"

And Aurélie, without being able, however, to give up the mysterious whisper which added so much to the effect of her story, told that Johnson, the butler, had received a warning from one of the keepers to keep a good look-out for the safety of the strong-room, as suspicious-looking persons had been seen about the park that afternoon. Geraldine started up, moved by a score of wild fears that chased each other in her fatigued and over-excited brain. At that moment the dinner-bell rang, and she had to go downstairs and listen to Eleanor's whimpering terrors and Elizabeth's scornful incredulity, for the story had reached their ears. She said little about it herself; but, when dinner was over, she asked the butler from which of the keepers he had received the warning.

"From Robert Davis, ma'am," said he.

Davis was one of the younger keepers, and he lived with his old mother in a cottage a few yards up the road, above the outer gate

of the park wood. Geraldine ran upstairs, put on a hat and mantle, and went out through the dining-room into the conservatory, the outer door of which was locked with the key inside. She went out, locked it behind her, and put the key into her pocket. She was not a coward, and the idea of crossing the garden and wood alone at night, with the possibility of dangerous characters lurking about, did not occur to her as alarming. She was anxious to learn from Davis exact particulars of what he had seen, free from the exaggerations of the servants. It was a misty night, and a light rain was falling; but it was not too dark for her to find her way across the lawn and through the rose garden into the grass walk. It was not until then, when she found herself shut in between two high walls of ever-greens, alone in the darkness and the silence, that a sense of the risk she was running suddenly touched her imagination, exalted by excitement, and made her start at a faint sound of the wind among the trees round the hidden pond on her left hand.

She stopped, not so much frightened as

fascinated, listening to that faint sighing of the night-breeze among the bare branches, and fancying that the weak call of a human voice mingled with it. This fancy, fantastic as it was, took hold upon her in her feverish state of mind, and led her to part the crisp branches of the laurels, and to force her way through to the edge of the pond, which lay all in black shadow before her, a dark and treacherous pit, as her feet sank in the slimy earth of its banks. Deep enough to drown a man, they said; and so to still all pain, and calm all fever, and stop the gnawing, aching, never-satisfied longing for rest, and peace, and forgetfulness. It was a dangerous moment for the weary, feverish, excited woman, whose over-strained imagination pictured to her, from morning till night, a terrible scene, in which her husband's hand should be raised against the life of the wretched man who, in boyhood, had been her playfellow, while she stood powerless to stay him.

She drew near to the green, slimy surface of the water, nearer than she thought, for her foot slipped downwards towards it, giving her

a slight shock as she drew it back. At that moment the cloud, which had darkened the face of the moon, passed, the black expanse before her grew more defined, and, out of the haze which hung over the water, Geraldine seemed to see a figure rise up, with haggard face and staring eyes, and seemed to hear a voice calling her by name. With a cry, she shrank back among the trees, and crept out, shuddering, into the grass path, down which she ran like the wind. For she would not turn back, though it required all her courage to face the terrors the path through the wood had for her after the shock that terrible phantom had given her; for, though the vision had been dim, and the cry a faint and ghostly cry, yet it seemed to her that the figure was James's figure and the voice James's voice, and she said to herself that at that moment he had died.

She reached Robert Davis's cottage, looking scarcely alive, so white and weak was she when old Mrs. Davis opened the door and found her leaning against the side of the porch. Her errand was a vain one after all, for Robert was out on his rounds; so, leaving the message

that he was to come up to the Hall in the morning and ask to see her, she returned through the crackling branches of the wood, and over the damp, soft carpeting of the grass-walk, without one look to right or left, and darted into the conservatory with a feeling of relief which she would not own. She locked the door carefully, and then, hearing voices inside the house, waited to recover complete composure before she went in.

As she entered the dining-room, she heard sobs and hysterical cries and a clamour of voices; the door was open, and in the inner hall beyond was a group of excited, frightened maids, in the midst of whom stood Johnson, armed with some kind of unserviceable-looking firearm, looking very valiant. Elizabeth was questioning the cook in a sharp voice; Eleanor was moaning on the upper flight of the staircase, listening to the tumult below, supported by Aurélie and the older ladies'-maid.

Geraldine's appearance was greeted by a chorus of shrieks.

"Where have you been? Aurélie said your were in your room, and that you had

locked the door and would not open it," said Elizabeth, in a sharper voice than ever.

"I have only been in the garden for a few minutes. What is all this scene about?"

Two or three accounts were offered at once, all unintelligible. Elizabeth quenched this outburst.

"They say there are thieves in the house. Martha was going to lock the back door for the night, when, opening it to look out, three men ran in past her—so she says—knocking her down and causing her to scream. One of the men was seen by the cook, who ran out of the servants' hall on hearing Martha's cries. But they cannot be found anywhere, and so the tale seems difficult to believe."

"So I should think," said Geraldine, impatiently, rather anxious to show some valour, to clear herself in her own eyes of the charge of letting her imagination run away with her. "Davis's story has turned everybody's head. Have you searched the house, Johnson?"

"Yes, ma'am; I've looked everywhere, and I can find no trace of anybody."

"Ah, so I expected! And I can trust

your evidence. Mrs. Marsden, I think you must have been mistaken. Martha, I am inclined to think Joe, or one of the stablemen, must have played you a trick. I think you may all go to bed in peace." Then, turning to Johnson, "Perhaps Thomas had better sleep downstairs to-night; he is not afraid, is he?"

"Not he, ma'am. But burglars might dance on his bed and he'd never wake up. I'll sleep downstairs too, ma'am, and my old ears and his young arms would settle a troop of them."

Martha was here brought forward to show her bruises in evidence, and to repeat more faintly that, if there wasn't three of them, there was two; and, if there wasn't one, how could she have been knocked down? And she added that her assailant was not Joe, or any one she had ever seen before; she saw his face quite plainly, and she would know him again anywhere; he was tall, and his face was quite white, and there was a mark of blood on his lip.

But this was so evidently an attempt to add to the effect of the tale of violent assault



by garnishing with details borrowed from the ordinary ghost-story, that it did not strengthen the kitchen-maid's case at all ; and she and her supporters, finding the story discredited by the authorities, had to retire somewhat crest-fallen to bed, mounting the stairs in a staggering phalanx, with starts and cries more or less suppressed at every step, and much spilling of candle grease. Then Geraldine bade good night to the old ladies, but did not at once follow them upstairs. As soon as she heard the keys turn in the locks of their doors, she turned to the old butler, to whom she had signed to remain with her, and asked quietly—

“Is there anything in the story?”

“I don't know, ma'am. There were marks of a man's boots in our passage ; but I can't follow them over the carpet of the hall. I didn't say anything about them, because the women, uneducated women like that, ma'am, are such fools.”

“We'll go once round the place ; but I'll give you Sir Charles's revolver first.”

She led the way into the library, took the revolver from the drawer in which it was

kept, and handed it to the old soldier, who had cleaned it many a time in the days gone by. He took it reverently, with moistened eyes.

"Is it loaded?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Then they started on their search, examined every nook and cranny in the big rooms and the wide halls on the ground-floor, Geraldine holding the lights with perfectly steady hands; for, now that she knew there was danger to be faced, she was calm and mistress of herself. At last, on the back staircase, they found a faint footprint, and the old servant looked up at his young mistress significantly.

"Upstairs, ma'am," said he.

So they went up very softly, afraid lest a sound should raise again that cackling female chorus; but the maids' quarters were far away, and the women were whispering and chattering and shivering much too busily to hear a louder noise than any made on that silent search.

They did not open the door of the room where Geraldine herself slept, which was the

first they came to on reaching the top of the stairs. It was too small to harbour a robber or to attract his notice, and nothing of value was kept there.

"Is it worth while searching upstairs, Johnson?" she asked, in a whisper, when they had got to the head of the back staircase again.

"Just as you please, ma'am ; but I think you may leave that to me."

"Very well, then. Take one of these. Good night."

He had taken the candle she held out, and Geraldine had turned the handle of her own door, when suddenly she drew back and summoned the servant, with a gesture and a startled face. The door was locked. Johnson stepped forward and tried it sharply, with no result. He stooped down and examined it.

"The key is in the lock, ma'am, on the inside. Perhaps it is only Aurélie, who has locked herself in in a fright. If you can give me a hairpin, I will have it open in no time."

Geraldine gave him one, and, after a few minutes' work on his knees, the old servant

rose and softly turned the door handle ; the door was open.

"Shall I go in, ma'am ? You had better let me. There is no light inside."

"Take care, then—take care. Hadn't we better call Thomas ?"

"No, ma'am ; there is no need for that," replied the old soldier ; and, with the light held high in his left hand and the revolver ready in his right, he pushed open the door and entered.

The savage "Ah !" which escaped his lips as he did so brought Geraldine quickly in after him. She was no coward ; but she uttered a cry as she saw kneeling beside her bed a man with his head bent down on his hands. The butler, who had thrust his candle down upon the mantelpiece, had his left hand upon the intruder's collar, when his mistress's exclamation caused him to turn round. Her eyes were fixed upon the culprit, who uttered no sound and made no movement. She crept forward slowly, step by step, her face wild with surprise and doubt and terror, until she was close beside him ; then, stooping, while the old butler watched her in perplexity, but with a strong

hold kept on his captive, she stretched out one hand slowly until it touched the still bent head of the kneeling man—then she moved nearer and nearer, and lowered her own face, still rigid with fright, until in the flickering candle-light she could see his. But as she met the horrible gaze of staring sightless eyes, she fell back with a moan of anguish.

“Oh, Heaven! he is dead! James, James!”

And the startled servant involuntarily moved the hand by which he held his prisoner, and drew him backwards and caught sight of the face himself. And he too saw that the wicked thief they had been pursuing was his old master's nephew, who had found his way, when exile and sickness had paid for his misdeeds, back to his old room in Waringham Hall to die.

## CHAPTER III.

FOR a few moments the kneeling figure was hardly more still than the two living, breathing occupants of the room, who stood horror-struck by their discovery, fascinated by the terrible sight, speechless and motionless beside him. But both lady and soldier-servant were by nature and habit too energetic to remain long paralyzed even by a calamity so terrible. The old butler raised James's arm, which had fallen heavily down as his body was moved backwards from the bed, felt his pulse, and put his hand over his heart, to learn whether he still breathed.

"We must send for a doctor, ma'am; I can't tell whether he is alive or dead."

This suggestion that there was still hope roused Geraldine at once from her stupor of

horror. But at the same moment there rushed into her mind a vivid sense of the perils which hung over the unfortunate man while he remained under this roof, with the spy Elizabeth ready to inform Captain Morrison of all that took place there.

"Stay with him, do what you can; but don't call any one while I go to fetch Mr. Crosse," she impressed upon the old man. And she fled downstairs and out of the house to beg their old neighbour and friend to come and help her.

Mr. Crosse was still up, beating his wife at bezique, as he had done now nearly every night for the last eight years. Geraldine did not tell him who it was for whom she so urgently begged his help, until they were crossing the park together. She was holding his hand to hurry him along, and, as she ran to keep pace with his strides, she whispered breathlessly, "Mr. Crosse!"

"Yes, my dear."

"The man—the man—I want you to see is James—James Otway."

"James! Dear me! Why didn't you say

so before? When did he arrive? What an extraordinary thing!"

"Yes, more extraordinary than you think. But it is a secret; if my husband were to hear of it, it wouldn't be of much use for you to save his life."

The doctor looked grave. Her extraordinary earnestness, James's arrival during her husband's absence, could suggest but one conclusion. But she poured out her words without noticing the effect this opening had upon him.

"There is some mystery about his coming. I don't think he can have been in his right senses when he came; for he crept in by the back door, just as they say he used to do when he was a child and had been out late in the woods, and he was found kneeling in the room which used to be his, just as if he had knelt down to say his prayers as he used to do when a boy."

The simple manner in which she related this, with the tears running down her cheeks, reassured the old gentleman, while it perplexed him still further.



"What makes you think Captain Morrison would treat him inhospitably?"

"He thinks James has behaved badly to a member of his family," said she, hesitatingly.

"And is it true?"

"Oh, I don't know; but I'm—I'm afraid it is!"

"Well, really, young Otway runs a tilt at the Decalogue with an audacity one is forced to admire. I should have thought that a man with the fear of the police before his eyes would have kept himself straight, at least, for a year or two; but here he is, not yet nine months escaped from prison, with another crime on his head already! Curious, very curious! Such a nice gentle lad as he was too, the very last person one would have thought capable of such a crime as murder!"

"Sh—, Mr. Cross! I cannot bear it."

They had reached the Hall, the front door of which Geraldine had left open, so that they might enter quietly and without delay. At the head of the staircase they were met by Johnson, who led the way, not towards the room where James had been found, but towards

the now disused bachelors' wing, at the door of which stood Thomas, the young footman, who had only been in the family since the establishment of the new *ménage* at the Hall.

"Thomas and me have removed the thief to the third room in the east wing, ma'am," said the butler, gravely. "I don't think he is dead, sir."

Geraldine started at the daring suggestion this speech contained. Would it be possible to keep the identity of the intruder a secret, if he recovered, until he was safely out of the house? She said nothing, and Mr. Crosse said nothing, until they reached the musty dismantled room, to which, nearly twenty years ago, the baby Geraldine had been carried by James, her boy-lover.

Twenty years of decay and neglect had done their work on the disused room. The carpet, not good enough to be saved, was now a damp and mouldy rag, with pitfalls for the feet and holes that showed the rotten boards beneath. The ceiling was dark with stains, the paper on the wall on one side of the window had peeled quite away, and now hung

curled downwards towards the floor, showing the wall it had covered. The grate and bars of the fireplace were red with rust; what furniture was left in the room was dingy, dusty, worm-eaten. A lamp and three candles were on the coverless dressing-table by the bedstead; on the latter a mattress, dragged hastily out of the cupboard, had been flung; and, stretched upon this mean couch, his head raised by a sofa-cushion from the old schoolroom, was the luckless heir of the Otways, cold, still, to all appearance dead, safe in the home of his boyhood only so long as he could pass for a thief.

It was a strange situation, and seemed to Geraldine most piteous.

"Oh, not here! How could you bring him here!" she broke out, with a sob, as soon as she crossed the threshold into the prison-like room, the air of which made her shiver.

"I thought it was good enough for a burglar, ma'am, dead or alive," said Johnson, raising his eyes with one respectful, warning look.

For the astonished and curious footman

was outside the door, and within hearing. Geraldine shuddered and was silent, while Mr. Crosse went straight to the bedside, glanced at the prostrate man, snatched up a candle, bent down over him face to face, raised the closed eyelids, and looked at the pupils of the eyes, and turned quickly to the butler.

"Has that young man outside got a good head on his shoulders?"

"Pretty fair, sir."

"Then call him in." Mr. Crosse meanwhile took out his pocket-book, tore a leaf from it, and wrote a few words in pencil on the paper, which he handed to the footman. "Go to my house, ask to see Mrs. Crosse, say I sent you, and give her this. Bring back what she gives you as quickly as possible."

Before the servant was out of the room, Mr. Crosse turned to the bed, signing to the old butler to help him, and between them they raised the prostrate man, and with some difficulty set him on his feet, supporting him by their own shoulders. But to get him to move was a more difficult matter.

"Here, James, my man, wake up and step

out. James, I say, are you going to sleep? Rouse yourself, man, pull yourself together, and come along with us."

The young man raised his head with a grumbling sigh, kept his eyes vacantly open for a few moments, and closed them again.

"Speak to him, my dear."

Geraldine came forward, lifted his drooping head between her hands, and called to him. But it was of no use; he opened his eyes again drowsily, but did not seem to know her.

"Will you go and order a bath to be brought in here and some warm water? And can you have some strong coffee made? You can trust old Mrs. Symes, I am sure. And in a case like this I don't think she would stand on her dignity."

Geraldine knew that; the question was whether, called up in the middle of the night, the old lady could stand upon her feet. However, she ran up to the housekeeper's bedroom, entrusted her with the appalling secret that Sir James was the burglar, and that he was dying downstairs, and entreated her assistance. Mrs. Symes was a terrible person to have to

deal with in an emergency ; she pottered, she dawdled, she stopped in the midst of dressing to say, "Well, I never!"—she paused on her way downstairs to wonder whether it would not be better to go back and lock her door. If Geraldine had not feared the havoc her inexperience might work, she would have braved the descent alone into the servants' region herself, and trusted to Providence to help her there. As it was, she put the tottering and exhausted Mrs. Symes upon a chair and followed her directions. The fires were still alight and the coffee was soon made ; the footman, having returned with the tartar emetic for which he had been sent, now came down for the hot water. Mrs. Symes, being by this time in full possession of the utmost amount of energy and wakefulness of which she was capable, sent her mistress to her room, and took the coffee herself up to the east wing, promising to report upon the patient's condition.

Later in the night Geraldine knocked at the door of the sick-chamber, and after a few moments Johnson let her through.

"How is he?"

"He is better, ma'am. He has been very sick——"

"Oh, poor fellow!"

"It was what Mr. Crosse wanted, ma'am. Sir James had poisoned himself, accidentally no doubt, and——"

"Poisoned himself! Ah—with laudanum?"

"Morphine, I believe Mr. Crosse said, ma'am. He has found something which had contained it in Sir James's coat pocket. Shall I tell Mr. Crosse you wish to speak to him, ma'am?" he added, as Geraldine leant against the wall, too much stupefied to speak.

"Yes."

When Mr. Crosse came out, she rallied her energies and said faintly—

"Is it true? Was it—poison?"

"Yes, practically. He had over-dosed himself for something; we will find out for what to-morrow, for he is not quite himself yet. But you can go to bed with a quiet mind now, my dear lady, for he is as well as any fool can expect to be who drugs himself without proper advice."

"But he had advice; he is living under the supervision of a doctor."

"A doctor! Not much of a doctor, if he had anything to do with the dose James swallowed to-day; a chemist's errand-boy perhaps."

Geraldine did not answer; but her features had suddenly contracted with some thought full of horror. Mr. Crosse wanted her to go away, but she was not satisfied yet.

"What is he laughing about? I can hear him laughing and calling out. Is he in pain? He must be in pain to cry out like that."

"Yes, yes; but that is for a different reason altogether. He has been lying down on the wet ground somewhere, and he has got rheumatism in consequence. His head is not quite right yet, so he doesn't bear a few twinges as quietly as he might."

"May I see him?"

"Not to-night."

"Will he die?"

"Die! No, certainly not. He will have a bad cold, but that is no more than he deserves for his foolishness; and to-morrow we will call



him to account. But, if you don't go to bed at once, I'll write and tell Captain Morrison to——"

"Don't!" cried she, shuddering. "I am going. Thank you a thousand times for what you have done, what you are doing. But the thought of his lying there in that cold bare room among the r-r-rats and the m-m-mice is so dreadful!" she sobbed.

"Well, the r-r-rats and the m-m-mice won't be able to eat him up to-night, for Johnson and Mrs. Symes are going to watch by him, and he's got a fire and plenty of light, and he'll be as comfortable as a king, more comfortable than any burglar deserves to be. By-the-by, hadn't you better give up the burglar notion and make a clean breast of it, my dear lady? Forgive me for advising you, but I knew your guardian so many years that I don't like to see the little lady he loved like his own daughter doing anything that seems rash; and some husbands make the deuce of a row about a trifle of this sort."

"But Captain Morrison wouldn't think James a trifle, Mr. Crosse," said she, with a strained and awkward effort to speak lightly.

But the attempt broke down, and, to his astonishment, her whole face began to quiver with suppressed agony which would find its way out. He led her gently towards the outer door of the wing; but there she stopped, and, gasping for breath, turned to face him. "I must tell you, I must tell you!" she whispered hoarsely. "Nobody else can help me, nobody else can save him. Mr. Crosse, James did not try to poison himself; you think he did, but it is not so. He has two enemies; but one of them is human, and half warned me, when I last saw him, that James was in danger—that one is Lindley Fielding; but the other is a fiend," she went on, panting, hissing out her words in fiery haste. "He has sworn—sworn to my face—to hunt James down and to kill him; he has hired some one to poison him, I am sure of it. Yes, yes; he is treacherous, he has already proved that he will use any means, however base; and this is his work, I know."

"Well, whose work?" asked Mr. Crosse, seeing it was impossible to check the torrent of her impetuous accusation.

"Captain Morrison's—my husband's."

The old gentleman started, with a great shock.

"My dear Mrs. Morrison, think what you are saying. You really must not let your tongue run away with you like that!"

"I would not say it to any one but you," she assured him, forcing herself to speak very quietly; "but I must tell you, or you will not understand the situation. He has employed some one—I don't yet know who—to make away with James. I don't ask you to believe me, but only to remember what I say to-morrow when you are questioning James as to the way he got into the state in which we found him."

"But it is simply too preposterous! You forget where you are, and who your husband is, my dear lady. Crimes do get committed in this nineteenth century of ours, but not in quite such a simple-minded fashion as that. Captain Morrison is an English gentleman, and a soldier besides. It is conceivable that he, like other fiery-tempered men, might kill a man in a moment of passion; but the idea of his hiring

a bravo to do a 'deed of vengeance' is just about as funny as it would be for me to go about in a long gown trimmed with pictures of devils, and say that I cured people, or made them worse, as the case might be, by incantations over a caldron."

But Geraldine was past listening to reason ; and he saw that if he talked till the next morning she would not be convinced that her revelation was absurd. So he persuaded her to go to bed, and told her he would be sure not to let her husband know who the burglar was, if he could help it. And then he went back to have a last look at James, who had been allowed to go to bed. The young man was getting feverish, and was talking to Mrs. Symes, who sat in the room, in a confused and wandering manner, at one moment seeming to know who she was, while the next he called her "old fellow," and asked her if she would "go for a pull as far as Kew?" Mrs. Symes was not a bad nurse, having fortunately passed sixty-five years of life without contracting any opinions of her own ; therefore, after giving her such instructions as were necessary, and having

warned the butler, who was to sleep in the next room, to be on the alert, as the patient might get restless and troublesome, Mr. Crosse left the house and returned to his own home.

Geraldine heard the doctor go downstairs attended by the butler, heard Johnson creep softly up again, and she slipped out of her room and joined him at the door of the west wing. He started when, pulling the door open, he saw his young mistress pass quickly through and stop outside the third room, listening to the rambling talk of the sick man. However, after a moment's hesitation, he drew the bolt of the door, to shut out the one person they all feared, and retired to the room in which he was to rest until summoned by the housekeeper to take her place. Through the wall he could hear James's deep voice uttering curiously childish words.

"Do you think Uncle Charles will be very angry, Mrs. Symes? Will he send her away? Do you think he will send her away to punish me? Do you—do you think so, Mrs. Symes?"

Geraldine, who had pushed the door ajar, could see the poor old woman sitting by the

fire turn her head slowly towards the bed with open mouth and eyes round with dull consternation.

"I think you had better—try—to go to sleep, sir," she urged slowly, with laborious respectfulness, most unlike her attitude towards him in the old days which he, in his delirium, was living over again.

He understood the words, and answered her, "No, I can't go to sleep; I can't help thinking about the little thing, and I want to know what Uncle Charles is going to do with her. If he doesn't let me keep her, I shall run away. If he lets Mr. Corbyn have her, I shall go and be a poacher, and marry her when I grow up; and, if Mr. Corbyn lets her go to the workhouse, I'll pretend I'm a tramp and go to the workhouse too.—Oh!" he cried, with an exclamation of pain. "I must have caught cold sitting in that shed; I keep having such pains in my arms and back. Do you think she has caught cold, Mrs. Symes?" he asked anxiously.

"Who, sir?"

"You know, you know. The little baby—my baby that I found in the shed. Where is

she? What has become of her?" he asked, with a sudden doubt.

Mrs. Symes hesitated. But a plain question demanded a plain answer, and at last she faltered—

"She's grown up, sir, and—and married."

"What?" cried James.

"Hush, sir. You know it quite well; at least, you will to-morrow morning when you are quite yourself! Now you had better drink this and go to sleep."

"Yes, I'll go to sleep; but let me see the baby first, Mrs. Symes. Uncle Charles says I may keep her. He did; yes, he did. I am so glad; I do love her so."

"Hush, sir; you must not say that now she is a married lady!" said Mrs. Symes, trying to recall him to consciousness and propriety. "She is not a baby now, any more than you are a little boy."

He seemed puzzled, and put his hands up to his head, which he rolled about on the pillow, complaining that it ached. Suddenly he raised himself on his elbow and put out his hand to her eagerly.

"Mrs. Symes," said he in a whisper, "I want to ask you something; but—but don't tell any one I asked you. My head seems confused somehow, I can't remember things. Come here, closer, closer!" And he whispered something into her ear.

The housekeeper started back in horror.

"Your wife! Bless me, no, sir. She's Captain Morrison's wife, and——"

"Then, who is my wife? I can't remember anybody but her."

After a few moments' helpless consternation, in which she had discovered that his plaintive uncertainty, though strange and unorthodox, was genuine, the housekeeper answered discreetly, "I don't know as I've heard tell, sir, who your wife is; but I'll inquire, sir."

He was not satisfied. He looked at her doubtfully and sighed.

"Send the doctor," said he presently.

"Mr. Crosse, sir? He has gone to his house; but he has promised to be here again in the morning."

"Mr. Crosse? No, no, no—the doctor—you know—my brother!"



"You haven't a brother, sir," corrected the housekeeper, respectfully.

"Not really, I know," he agreed, impatiently. "But, you know, he always calls himself my brother, and comes when I want him. Tom!" he called out suddenly with all his force: then again — "Tom?" As there was again no answer, he fell back on his pillow, where he lay silent for a few minutes. Then he sprang up again. "Where is he? Why doesn't he come?"

"Perhaps he is too far away, sir."

"He's never too far to come when I want him," said the young man, affectionately; "at least, he never has been. If he has left me too, I'm done for. Do go and call him; see if he is in his room."

"I don't know who you mean, sir."

"Yes, yes, you do," cried James, impatiently. And as he looked at the old woman he put his hands over his eyes for a minute and made an effort to remember something. Then he said slowly, with his eyes fixed on her withered face, "You saw him when my uncle died—the doctor—you saw him, then."

But the words were not out of his mouth before their effect upon the old woman was overwhelming. With a feeble cry, she tottered backwards and sank into a chair, with one hand to her heart, gesticulating with the other to beg him to be silent. All power to speak seemed to have left her. James watched her, but without curiosity or intelligence. At last she muttered in a broken voice—

“Heaven have mercy upon us! Not him!”

And as she leant back in her chair, with staring eyes, and her lips still moving, though no sound passed them, Geraldine, afraid of the result upon the old woman of the overpowering emotion under which she was evidently labouring, entered the room softly and went up to her. But no sooner had he caught sight of her, than James uttered a loud cry and sprang up on his elbow. Both women turned. His whole face was alight with an exalted feverish joy, his eyes were glistening, his lips were parted; but as Geraldine made a step towards him, he did not move or speak. In spite of the flood of recognition which had swept in an instant over his face, his brain was still clouded; he thought

her presence a vision created by his imagination. She saw this, and took advantage of it. Signing to him to lie down again, which he did at once like a child, she seated herself softly at a little distance from him, and remained almost as still as a statue, until his eyes, fixed upon her, not with the feverish passion of a man for a woman, but with the unflinching, steady adoration of a worshipper for a saint, at last gradually closed, and he fell peacefully asleep. She had sat with her eyes turned shyly away, glancing at him from time to time ; and, as soon as his eyelids dropped, she in her turn watched him. When she was sure that he was asleep, she rose with the tears running down her cheeks.

"Poor boy!" she murmured to herself softly. Then, turning to the housekeeper, she whispered, "I'm going to my room now. Mind you keep up the story of the burglar in the morning ; say he fell downstairs and hurt himself severely ; and don't, on any account, let Miss Elizabeth or anybody but Johnson and Thomas see him."

And Geraldine went to her room and prayed for the poor brother who had come back so tragically, with a good deal more

fervour than she could put into the perfunctory petition she uttered on behalf of her husband.

Next morning when she awoke, a sense of the difficulty of the part she had to play fell upon her like lead. She abstained from going to see James before breakfast, for fear of rousing Elizabeth's suspicions, and she summoned all her self-possession in order to tell the story of the injured burglar who had been placed in the west wing, with as much spirit as she could. The elder lady listened with almost suspicious credulity, and advised that, if possible, the whole affair should be kept from Eleanor, who would certainly give them endless trouble if she knew that there was a live thief under the same roof with her.

"And how soon do you suppose you will be able to get rid of him?" asked Elizabeth.

"Oh, he won't stay here any longer than we can help, you may be sure. Mr. Crosse is coming this morning, and I shall ask him. What I am most afraid of is that it should come to Philip's ears."

"You are afraid it might bring your husband back?"

"I am afraid he might brick us up alive to ensure our freedom from molestation," said Geraldine, her colour rising at the sneer.

"You will give the man up to the police, of course?"

These words gave Geraldine such a shock that she could not reply for a few moments; her mouth had suddenly become dry, her throat parched. But when she answered, it was with spirit.

"No," she said. "When once a man had been tended by my servants, by my orders, he would be safe in my house, even if he had committed murder." But as the last word fell from her lips she shuddered.

And with their mistrust of each other rather increased than abated, the two ladies rose from the breakfast-table and separated. Geraldine went to the library to await Mr. Crosse's arrival. She had not been there five minutes before she heard a ring, and heard Elizabeth rush out of the drawing-room to meet him. Mrs. Morrison listened in an ecstasy of mischievous delight, for the doctor repeated the story upon which they had agreed, and asked

to see herself. Johnson knocked at the library door. She came out and shook hands with Mr. Crosse, who instantly led her towards the staircase, leaving Elizabeth discomfited.

"It is a miserable business, this of poor Otway's," he said, as soon as they were out of hearing. "I have been awake thinking about it half the night, and so, I can see, have you. Now, I want to get to the root of it, and I want you to help me by getting him to speak out freely; but, you know, my dear lady, if you will approach the question with a *parti pris*——"

"But I won't—I won't! I spoke hastily last night; I am sorry. I will do just what you please, and say what you please. I am more anxious to get at the whole truth than you can be."

He looked at her very attentively, saw that her conviction was unchanged, that the feverish fancy of the night had become the steady belief of the morning; but he saw too that her self-command was complete, and that she would keep her word. So she waited while he went into the west corridor and into the room which

James occupied ; and, after a few minutes' conversation with his patient, the doctor came to the door and beckoned to her. She came slowly towards him, afraid lest the sudden rush of blood to her face and her quickened breathing should make him again doubt her self-control ; but his head was turned towards the patient as she passed him.

James was sitting in an armchair by the fire ; the room was hot, but he was shivering, though the hand he held out to her was dry and feverish. After one shy glance at her, he looked at anything but Geraldine, his eyes wandering restlessly from ragged carpet to mouldy wall-paper, from thence to the doctor, and from him to the fire, while he answered nervously and briefly her first questions as to his night's rest, and whether he was well. Then there was a pause, which Mr. Crosse, being the most composed of the three, was naturally the first to break.

"You were right, Mrs. Morrison, about the circumstances under which he over-dosed himself," said he, with a keen and most expressive look. "It was the fault of a friend of his—a

doctor; and when I say a fault," he added, as James was about to protest, "I dare say over-fatigue had much to do with the strong effect the morphine had upon him. It seems he has taken it several times lately to deaden the pain he has suffered since a fall he had a short time ago."

"Yes; you know I told you about it, Del-dee," said James, glancing at her.

"I remember," Geraldine answered, leaving it to the doctor, whose expression seemed to her to denote that he was following some plan, to lead the conversation as he would.

"I should think, from what you have told me, the pain you speak of is simply violent indigestion. You say you felt it yesterday as you were walking from Goldborough. When did you eat last before then, and what did you eat?"

"I had had nothing but a sandwich since breakfast."

"One you got at a station, I suppose; an end of tough ham hidden between two layers of stale bread, its rancidity disguised by mustard."



"No. Tom—that is, my doctor; the man I call my brother, Deldee—cut them himself just before I started, so they couldn't have hurt me. And, now I remember, I didn't even finish them; there was something the matter with them—too much mustard or something, so I only ate one, and threw the rest out of the window of the train."

"You can't have done that, for we found them in your pocket," said Mr. Crosse, carelessly, as he amused himself by straightening with the toe of his boot the long loose strings over a hole in the carpet.

"In my pocket! But I tell you I threw them away out of the left-hand window of the carriage just as the train slackened, coming into Goldborough."

"Did you? Oh, well, I thought Johnson said he found some in your overcoat; it isn't of much consequence. Some one will fall over this hole in the carpet before the day is over," he observed, with more interest. "Why didn't your doctor come with you, James? You say he has been living with you, and that he is your only friend. If he had been with

you, he wouldn't have let you take such a dose."

"He doesn't know I've come here," James replied, growing nervous again. "He sent me off to Dublin yesterday, saw me off by the Irish Mail at 7.15 in the morning."

"Dublin! May one ask, what you were going to do there?"

"I was going to try to clear up that story about me—that infamous story that I dare say you have heard," James answered, his voice growing sonorous and his eyes beginning to shine with anger.

Both his hearers started. Geraldine could scarcely breathe.

"Yes, I know—infamous! Well?" the doctor muttered.

"Well, it was by his advice that I was going. He has been my counsellor all through this business. On the very first night when I left Waringham, after the Vicar and my affectionate aunt had brought that infernal charge against me," said he, growing more and more excited, "as I was going up to London by myself, he happened to get into

the same carriage with me at Exmundham—I had seen him once before, and taken a most absurd prejudice against him. I was in a wretched state, you know, Deldee, for you got my letter, didn't you?"

"Yes," she replied, in a trembling voice.

"Well, I was half mad; and he, knowing who I was, asked me a few questions about Waringham, and, finding I had nowhere in particular to go to, suggested that I should go to his chambers in town for the night. He was awfully kind, and before I left him next morning I had told him all the story. He was very indignant about it, and so much interested in it, that at last I put myself in his hands in the matter. It was by his advice that I went abroad first, while he made inquiries in England. When I came back, he met me and told me what he had found out; it was on that very evening I met with the accident I told you about. I have been more or less seedy ever since, and he has been as devoted to me as if I had really been his brother, as he calls me. I've been so queer that I seemed to have lost all energy for going on with the inquiry into

this rascally fraud of which I've been made the victim ; and at last it was Tom himself who insisted that I ought to go to Ireland——”

“Of course ; you ought to have gone there at first,” interrupted Mr. Crosse, who had listened with much attention, though it was impossible for Geraldine to discover whether or not he believed James's story.

“Ever since—ever since—a few days ago,” continued James, growing embarrassed as he glanced furtively at Geraldine, “I have felt a longing to see—to see Waringham again. Tom said I must not. He said Captain Morrison was angry because you came to see me, Deldee—I don't know how Tom found that out—and he said it would not do for me to come and see you, as your husband was away—he knew that too. But yesterday morning, when I had started for Holyhead—I wasn't very well, and that helped to make me feel sentimental, I dare say—such a longing to see you again came over me, Deldee,” said James, whose nervous shyness had given way before his excitement as he went on talking, “that at Willesden I jumped out of the train, went

to an hotel, and had a couple of hours' sleep, and drove to Liverpool Street, where I caught the twelve o'clock train. Then, as I tell you, I felt the old pains, soon after getting out of the train at Goldborough to walk over here. Luckily, as I thought, Tom had given me a dose in case I should have an attack, which I took at once; but it seemed to affect me more than usual. I got so heavy and stupid that I could scarcely get here. I came in by the path through the wood, and then I seemed to forget what I was there for, and I think I must have gone half asleep there. Then something roused me, and I just remember thinking to myself that I must slip in through the back door to my room—that was what I used to do when I was late, as a child—and then I can't remember anything clearly till I found myself in bed in the middle of the night with Johnson staring at me from this chair."

"What is the doctor's name?"

"Ledbury. He came down to see my uncle in his last illness."

"I remember," said Mr. Crosse. Geraldine

was watching him curiously ; but the old gentleman's face had grown during the last ten minutes as expressionless as a mask. "Well, I can't pretend to be as clever as Doctor Ledbury; but I think in a day or two we shall be able to start you off for Ireland again. Keep as quiet as you can, don't excite yourself, don't get into draughts. I'll come and see you again in the evening. Mrs. Morrison, can you give me a pen and a scrap of paper?"

She left the room, and in a few minutes he followed her, and met her coming towards the door with writing materials. He seemed to be in a great hurry, and he scribbled a prescription, using the ledge of the window as a desk, while he said in a low voice—

"I want you to promise not to see Otway again until I return. I shall be back as soon after luncheon as I can, and then I may have something to tell you."

"Very well; I promise," said she at once, glancing up at him with quiet confidence.

And she accompanied him downstairs and watched him hurry off through the rose corner

towards the wood, which was the shortest way to his home.

It was a hard matter to live through three or four hours of impatient waiting, and after luncheon Geraldine escaped into the wood, in order to meet the doctor a few moments sooner. It was more than an hour, however, before he appeared. She was half a dozen yards from the gate when he came through, looking somewhat excited, she thought, though he walked slowly and did not at once speak.

“Well?” said she.

“Well?” he echoed.

“You said you would have something to tell me.”

“Did I? I think I had better keep it to myself.”

“Oh no—oh no, Mr. Crosse; it was a promise! It can’t be anything worse than I suspect. I will do just what you please, and be as quiet as you like; but do trust me. Look here! If James has to go away before I know anything more, I shall go with him.”

“My dear—my dear Mrs. Morrison, pray remember——”

"I remember everything. I remember more than you know of. It is not sentimental devotion, but a matter-of-fact duty for me to save him from danger. I don't think I should enjoy his society; I am sure he would get tired of mine. But as long as he has a sister by his side to watch over him, no one can abuse his trusting nature, as they have done, as they shall never do again."

"And do you think a man would allow you to sacrifice yourself like that? For I need not point out to you, my dear Mrs. Morrison, that such strait-laced fogeys as I and the rest of your acquaintance, whose opinion of course you despise, will be too obtuse to see that it is your duty to run away from your husband with another man."

Geraldine blushed, and turned towards the house with firmly set lips and a dangerous fire of resolution in her eyes.

"Now, don't you want to hear what I have to tell you?" asked the old doctor, still drily.

She hesitated. Even wounded pride had to give way to her burning wish to know what that fact was of which he was master.



She looked up at him imploringly, with a long, sobbing sigh.

"If you please," said she, meekly.

"You know I said from the first that the pains Otway complained of were the result of indigestion." Geraldine glanced up incredulously. "Well, I resolved to find out what could have disagreed with him. So I drove to Goldborough, and hunted along the line just where the trains from London slacken as they come into the station." She listened intently. "In a little cottage garden, a few yards from the metals, I found a piece of white note-paper with greasy stains upon it, and a little way from this some fragments of bread; very small scraps though, for the owner of the garden kept fowls there, and they had eaten up the rest." The doctor paused, and then continued quietly, "Apparently the sandwiches hadn't agreed with them any better than they had with James, for the fowls—there were three of them—were dead."

"Oh, Mr. Crosse!"

"I had picked up one and was examining it with some interest, when the proprietress

of the garden came out with an armful of clothes to hang out to dry, and wanted to know what I had done to her hens ; and when I said I was only looking at them she wanted to know what I was trespassing in her garden for. Of course the old thief knew they were dead, for they had been lying in her dirty little cabbage-ground since yesterday, and I dare say she thought me a great flat when I gave her half a crown and, after a few inquiries as to the time and manner of their death, which she, now seeing I was a man of business, thought fit to answer, took up my three prizes, the greasy paper, and the few crumbs I could find, and went off with them. You guess what I did then ? ”

Geraldine moved her head in assent ; she was white to the lips.

“ I took them home and shut myself up with them, analyzed the contents of their crops, and found—— ”

“ What—what ? ”

“ Nothing injurious.”

“ I don't understand ! I can't believe it ! They must have been poisoned ! ”

"Yes ; but by a poison that defies analysis. There are two tests, however, both of which I applied—the one is taste, the other its effect on living animals. Both succeeded. You have heard of digitaline?"

"Yes," whispered Geraldine, whom the ghastly certainty seemed to paralyze.

"That was the condiment which, by mistake or—or by design, had been used to flavour James's sandwiches. I dare say the 'too much mustard,' of which he complained, had been used to conceal the taste of the—of the other condiment, which is very bitter."

"Now do you believe?" began Geraldine, with passionate earnestness.

"I believe nothing, my dear Mrs. Morrison, but that James has been in very bad hands—very unskilful ones, to begin with."

"Unskilful! But Doctor Ledbury——"

Mr. Crosse interrupted her by a contemptuous exclamation.

"That is all a nonsensical story! Doctor Ledbury not merely a poisoner, but a stupid, dull, bungling one! Why, my chief wonder is how the fool who poisoned James could have got

hold of the digitaline, which is not sold to the first comer like twopennyworth of rat poison!"

"But, Mr. Crosse," cried Geraldine, seizing his arm, "James knows Doctor Ledbury!"

"Knows a man who passes himself off to him under the shelter of a great name—very likely. Why, do you suppose a fashionable London physician would have the time to potter about with James, and tend him devotedly, and see him off to Dublin, and the rest of it? I can't imagine how Otway himself could be so grossly humbugged. And do you really think that, after messing him about with two different poisons on a system which, perhaps, was not without ingenuity, he would send him off on a long journey, armed with two final doses, either of which, if James had been travelling in an express train by himself, without possibility of assistance, would have left him dead as a door-nail in two or three hours? The thing is absurd!"

"But, Mr. Crosse," she cried, in a weak and trembling voice, "how could James make a mistake? He saw Doctor Ledbury when he came to see Sir Charles."

"Then, all I can say is that the man who came to see Sir Charles was not Doctor Ledbury at all."

She sank back without a word—bewildered, stunned, while the old doctor, on his side, looked disturbed. After trotting a few steps past her, he turned and put his hand on her shoulder impressively.

"Now, look here!" said he. "I don't ask you not to tell this to anybody, because, luckily, you have nobody to tell; but I ask you not to suspect anybody."

"I don't suspect now; I know."

"You don't know everything. Don't put two and two together too fast, or it is sure to make five; and, above all things, leave the interrogation of James to me."

"You must not leave it long, or there will be no James to interrogate. I am sure Elizabeth guesses something, and Elizabeth is my husband's spy. If he once takes the matter out of the hands of the 'hired assassins' you laughed at me for believing in, he will use a quicker means than poison."

"Hush, hush! I told you not to suspect.

But—er—write to Captain Morrison, and get him to answer you ; you may as well keep yourself informed of his whereabouts. And—and keep James quiet until I come and see him this evening. I will come in directly after dinner.”

He shook hands with her and left, and Geraldine returned quickly towards the house. There were fresh marks of wheels and hoofs on the gravel in front of the portico ; whoever it was that had called must have gone, for no carriage was in sight. She let herself in, and, as she opened the door, she smelt the scent of a cigar. James downstairs, she thought, in alarm. But the moment after she heard a man’s laugh, and the voice was one she did not know.

## CHAPTER IV.

A FEAR, so terrible that it kept her rooted to the spot where the stranger's voice had fallen upon her ears, rose up in Geraldine's heart as soon as she found herself inside the Hall. She listened breathlessly, with her face turned towards the door of the study, from which she fancied the sound had come; but for some minutes she heard nothing more. She could almost have believed that the strange laugh which had frightened her was the creation of her imagination, but that the scent of cigars in the hall, though faint, was unmistakable. She walked very softly towards the inner hall, with her eyes fixed fearfully upon the library door; the moment her self-possession returned she was madly anxious to get upstairs to the west wing to ascertain that James was safe, and to

learn, either from Johnson or Mrs. Symes—one or other of whom was sure to be about—who the stranger in the study was, and who was with him.

But she was satisfied on the latter point sooner than she wished, for she had not reached the entrance to the inner hall when the door of the library opened, and two gentlemen came out. The first was tall and fair; he had a handsome, cold face, a long, light, well-cut beard, and was rather bald; behind him was her husband, who stopped her as she redoubled her speed, hoping to escape to warn and save James. She paid no heed to his first call, "Geraldine!" but when she had got half way up the stairs, she heard his step behind her, and felt his hand laid peremptorily upon her shoulder. It was the hardest thing she had ever had to do yet to turn and look, with an affectation of surprise and a smiling welcome, into the dark face of this man whose very touch on her arm seemed to brand her like hot iron, whose red lips were quivering, and his brown eyes gleaming with passions grown menacing in their fierceness. Her task



needed an effort so supreme that she did it well, though not well enough to convince a jealous husband of her sincerity.

"Philip! You! I can scarcely believe it. Why didn't you telegraph, and I would have come to meet you?"

"Thank you," he replied, taking no notice of the cheek she held out to him to kiss in the enthusiasm of her welcome. "I didn't want to rob myself of the sight of the pleasure you always show when you see me unexpectedly."

But the young wife was too much excited by the return of her treasure to be easily snubbed.

"How long have you been here?" she asked, turning to go down, and leading him with her. "Haven't you had any luncheon? You must be starving!" and she hurried into the dining-room, which was opposite the staircase, and rang the bell.

"I am not hungry, thank you; I breakfasted late. If you will not mind having dinner a little earlier, I will wait till then. I have brought a friend with me, and I want to

introduce him to you. I have had to leave him at the library door while I came to fetch you, as you unfortunately did not hear me call you," said Captain Morrison, very coldly, watching her from the door of the room with the same threatening expression.

She followed him obediently into the outer hall, where the stranger was waiting. Her first hasty glance at him, as she tried to escape, had told her nothing; but now that she met him face to face she recognized, before her husband spoke again, the face she had seen at the window of the carriage, as it drove past her and James on the night of her guardian's death. And again, in the midst of the terror which grew tenfold stronger upon her at sight of him, the vague fancy that she knew the face well occurred to her as it had done then.

She felt that she knew the very worst now that her husband had boldly introduced his tool, the poisoner, under his own roof; if her self-command should fail her for one moment, James was lost. The danger called forth all her strength; and she shook hands with Doctor Ledbury with charming grace, and led the way

towards the drawing room with her brightest air of welcome.

"We were going upstairs, my dear, to see this interesting prisoner whom Johnson tells me you have captured," said her husband, with his eyes fixed upon her in a marked manner.

"Oh, the injured burglar? You have heard about him already. Well, the burglar can wait. I am dying to hear what has brought you back so suddenly, and to tell you all about our fright last night."

Anything for a delay, during which she might find an opportunity of getting James out of the way. Without absolutely tearing his arm from the caressing but firm clasp of her hand, Captain Morrison could not escape; but he went into the drawing-room with her without once taking his mocking eyes from her face, and it seemed to her that he took a cruel delight in the torture she could not doubt he knew she was suffering. Doctor Ledbury followed.

"Have you seen the Miss Otways yet?" she asked.

"No; we have only been in the house a few minutes. Ah, Miss Otway, how do you do?" said he, going up to Eleanor, who was crouching over the fire.

Anxious to find out the relations which existed between James's enemies, Geraldine watched the meeting between Elizabeth and each of the two gentlemen. Between her and Captain Morrison the understanding was clear, as soon as their hands touched and their eyes met. It was just as clear that she was surprised to see Doctor Ledbury, though she greeted him very cordially.

"I hear you had a fright last night," observed Captain Morrison almost immediately, "and that your burglar tried to make himself interesting, when he failed to get away, by breaking his leg."

"Indeed, I can't tell you much about it, Philip, for such a mystery has been made of the whole affair that it was only by accident I learned that there had been a burglary at all," said Elizabeth, drily.

"A mystery!" exclaimed he, just at the moment that Eleanor broke in with—

"Oh, Philip, isn't it dreadful? I have only just heard of it, and——"

"And I did not mean that you should hear of it at all, Aunt Eleanor, until the poor wretch was out of the house," interrupted Geraldine, seizing this excuse. "I particularly told Johnson and Mrs. Symes that it was to be kept from you, as I knew very well you would not sleep if you heard of it."

"And had you the same fear for me, Geraldine?"

"No, Aunt Elizabeth. In that case I should not have told you all about it, as I did at breakfast this morning. Don't you remember?"

"And where was he found?" asked Captain Morrison.

"In one of the bedrooms, I believe."

"Oh! And who found him?"

"Johnson. The man fell downstairs in trying to escape, and hurt himself. So I went for Mr. Crosse, who is coming again this evening to see him. Shall I ring for Johnson to tell you all about it?"

She was anxious to do this, in the hope of

getting a chance of whispering or signing to the old butler that one short sentence, "Send him away." But her husband answered—

"No, that doesn't matter, for Doctor Ledbury and I are going up to have a look at him ourselves. Is he up?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Was he up when you went to see him this morning?" asked Elizabeth, with such evident vindictiveness in her affected indifference that, if Geraldine had not already guessed that the elderly lady had suspicions, she would have guessed it then.

"When I went up with Mr. Crosse? Oh yes; but he seemed very ill and quite stupid!"

"Drunk when he was caught, very likely," put in Doctor Ledbury, in his low voice. They were almost the first words he had spoken.

"The doctor said he had taken something which disagreed with him," she answered, turning round and meeting the handsome stranger's cold blue eyes with a long, grave gaze that brought the blood to his face.

This effect of her bold experiment shocked her. She did not hear Eleanor's querulous voice until it had called for the third time—

“Geraldine!”

“Yes, Aunt Eleanor?” And she crossed over to the invalid, glad to leave the neighbourhood of her husband's accomplice.

“Did you really see him? What did he look like? Was he hardened, or did he seem grateful and sorry?”

“I didn't say much to him, Aunt Eleanor; I only went with Mr. Crosse, you know, and he did most of the talking. The poor man seems too stupid at present for one to know what he thinks.”

“I should like to go to see him, Geraldine,” said the old lady, in her feeble cracked voice. “It is just at these times, when affliction is upon them, that a word in season may take root. Will you go with me, dear?”

These words went nearer to the destruction of Geraldine's self-command than all the cross-examination that had gone before. She affected to draw the woollen shawl round the old lady's tiny bent shoulders to give herself

time to recover from the rush of feelings which the naïve little bleat called up in her.

"I think you had better wait, Miss Otway, until our interview with him is over : then your kind sympathy with him for the ill-success of his enterprise will come like the jam after the powder," said Captain Morrison, rising.

Doctor Ledbury rose too.

"Don't be very harsh to him, Captain Morrison," pleaded the old lady, whose prejudice against the unholy trade of soldiering was so great that she could never call him by his Christian name. "Remember it is blessed to forgive," she added, with the unconscious impertinence with which the most timid of women often assume the authority of Scripture.

But the gleam of the officer's dark eyes, which seemed to make his whole face flash fire when he was under the influence of passion, caused Geraldine to spring up from her seat in spite of herself, and to hurry after him as he turned and walked towards the door.

"Stay here," said he, shortly, in a very low voice, but with authority which she did not try



to resist. Then he beckoned to Elizabeth, who followed him and Doctor Ledbury out of the room. Geraldine leant against the partition, staring at the door in dumb horror, unconscious of everything but that one fact, that James's two worst enemies, one of whom had sworn, while the other had tried, to kill him, were on their way to the room where she had left him, helpless with illness, that morning. Of course she was too much excited to see clearly that there was nothing in the world less likely than that these two men should fall upon him and make an end of him at once; and, after a few moments of agony, she could bear the suspense no longer, and rushed at the door. The key, which was on the outside, had been softly turned. She flew towards the nearest window, and, with a few words of unintelligible explanation and soothing to Miss Eleanor, whom her startling proceedings had brought to the verge of hysterics, she jumped out over the narrow flower-bed underneath on to the path, ran towards the conservatory, and through it into the dining-room. At the inner door, as she

opened it, she met the butler, who was looking up the staircase and listening, with his mouth open and every appearance of curiosity. At sight of his mistress he turned, put his finger respectfully to his lips, and came towards her.

"Go back, ma'am; they are coming down. It's all right; he is gone."

She did not wait for another word, but flew back into the drawing-room by the way she had come, closed the window softly, and applied herself to the task of comforting Miss Eleanor, who instinctively began to sob more energetically as soon as she appeared.

"Don't say anything about my leaving the room," she whispered, as voices were heard outside.

The key was turned, the door opened, and the three conspirators, as Geraldine chose to consider them, reappeared. She just glanced up, saw an expression on her husband's face which she did not care to meet, and continued her ministrations to the old invalid with sweet and soothing calmness.

"Don't be unhappy, Aunt Eleanor; here they come. I'm sure they haven't been very

harsh to him," said she, squeezing her hand as a suggestion to the old lady to be silent as to the events of the past few minutes. "Now you and I will go and see him, and we'll read him a chapter if you like." And she began to lead the invalid towards the door, when her husband's voice stopped her.

"Where are you going?"

"Aunt Eleanor won't be satisfied until she has seen the burglar."

"Unfortunately that little excitement is over. He has escaped," said her husband, watching her keenly.

Miss Eleanor's horror at the idea that the burglar was loose again was so much stronger than her philanthropy had been, that Captain Morrison had to spring forward in order to prevent her collapsing in a heap upon the floor. Geraldine overwhelmed him with questions, while she glanced at the other two. Doctor Ledbury's handsome face looked eager and resolute; she thought he was uneasy. Elizabeth showed bitter disappointment much more plainly.

"I believe that infernal old fool, Johnson,

had something to do with it!" muttered Captain Morrison to Elizabeth, while the old lady was being restored to composure. Geraldine heard this, and heard him add, "But I begin to think you must have been mistaken, for"—and he added something in a lower voice about "boots found and a crowbar in the room where he slept." And Geraldine gave a shrewd guess as to what "old fool" had put them there.

"But I'll have the police sent after him. We'll go to the police-station at Goldborough at once. What do you say to that, Doctor Ledbury?"

"Better wait till you know what you want them for," answered the doctor's low voice.

And Captain Morrison's passionate eyes flashed up at him an inquiring glance, and the cold blue ones answered by a steady look which had the effect of making his host drop his suggestion. The accord between them was evidently perfect.

"Well, he must be found, at any rate!"

"For the sake of these ladies, who will be nervous while they fancy he may still be about

the place, I think so too," said the doctor, very calmly.

His host sprang up and beckoned to him, and they again left the room together, after a few words of courteous apology to the ladies by the doctor, who remained perfectly cool and self-possessed, while Captain Morrison was evidently on fire and impatient of a moment's delay in action.

Geraldine again felt sick with terror. James, ill as he was, could not have had time to get out of reach of the bloodhounds upon his track, who began by a thorough search of the house itself, the interrogation of all the servants and the lodge-keeper. No one had seen a man leave the house or pass through the grounds. The gamekeeper, who had seen the suspicious-looking person in the road outside the park the day before, and Thomas, who had seen the burglar after he was caught, gave conflicting accounts of his personal appearance ; the former did not think he should know him again, the latter thought perhaps he might, but was not sure. Geraldine herself, who was a silent and anxious ear-witness of some of these interroga-

tories, was surprised at the unanimity with which they all declared they had seen no strange person about the house or grounds that day. There was no feudal feeling of attachment to the outlawed heir of the Otways among the present dependents at Waringham, most of the old ones having been pensioned off, while their places were filled by a troop of younger and more active servants. All that the butler would tell her, when she found an opportunity of speaking to him privately, was, that Sir James was safe. But every moment, while the search of the house continued, Geraldine feared to hear from the frightened maids, who collected in knots of two and three in every corner, within earshot of the two gentlemen as they hunted high and low, cries and shrieks to give notice that the burglar was caught.

But they returned to the Hall disappointed, with the butler, stolid of face as usual, at their heels. He had accompanied the two gentlemen on their expedition, and had been most useful in putting at their disposal his thorough knowledge of the building, by pointing out and examining a dozen unsuspected holes and

corners where a thief might have hidden ; but, interesting as the expedition thus became, it was unsuccessful. The old servant, had, however, so much impressed his master by his unobtrusive zeal, and by the fact that he was the only person in the house who was ready to swear that he should know the man again anywhere, that Captain Morrison's suspicions concerning the identity of the intruder began to fade away, and his determination to discover him assumed less ferocious form. But Doctor Ledbury was less credulous ; Geraldine heard him say to her husband in his low voice, when they returned from an unsuccessful search of the grounds and neighbourhood—

“Old servants are the d— ; they can tell a lie better than their masters. Keep an eye on that old fox, and you'll see him go to his hole.”

And Geraldine, who was eavesdropping among the bushes of the rose-corner as the two gentlemen returned to the house, caught these words, and reported them to the butler, who received them as a compliment, but said nothing about the warning implied in the last sentence.

Geraldine had had time to ask herself a

hundred questions as to when and how the connection had been formed between her husband and this doctor, who had attended her guardian's death-bed. The remembrance of this latter fact roused new and horrible fears in her mind. How came this poisoner, whom Mr. Crosse declared to be no doctor at all, at the sick-bed of Sir Charles? She remembered that it was Lindley Fielding who had brought him—the man whom James had cursed as the instrument of his own ruin. She could have no doubt now that this so-called doctor was an accomplice of Lindley's. But an accomplice in what? What object could they have in ruining him, in murdering him? At what point of their long and savage persecution of him did Captain Morrison step in to profit by their hatred in the interest of his own revenge? It was clear that he was not the first instigator of their plot—since plot there must be—for it seemed that they had never lost sight of James, while Captain Morrison had married her in order to get on his track. Lindley's old stories, long since disregarded as idle nonsense, about herself and her parentage



came back to her mind. Was he really her father, as he had at one time asserted? If so, would this fact give any clue to the whole mystery? She could not readily believe, in spite of her prejudice against him, that Lindley was capable of conniving at a murder. He was quite a different type of rogue from the calm, fish-blooded Doctor Ledbury, for he was nervous, bold only by impulse, and imperturbably possessed by belief in his own rectitude; he was a man also utterly unable to burden his conscience—he had a conscience—with a desperate crime of any sort, except for an immediate return in the pounds, shillings, and pence of which he was always so urgently in need. This last consideration suddenly suggested to Geraldine a possible way to a solution of the whole mystery. She knew Lindley's address; she would try to bribe him. Or should she try through his wife?

Geraldine was in her own room, dressing for dinner, when these reflections at last resulted in this suggestion of a course of action. But, following upon it, came a remembrance which made her start up and hurriedly unlock

the old school-desk which she kept in her room, and take from a corner underneath everything else the photograph of Mrs. Fielding, on the back of which was written, "To Harry, with Ada's love." She knew now that "Harry Hammond" was the *alias* under which, for what purpose, if he was innocent of the charge of murder, she did not know—James had lived at Chiswick. She remembered Mrs. Fielding's horror on hearing that "Harry Hammond" was in the neighbourhood, yet she had professed to have seen James only the night before. Then what connection was there, or had there been, between them? And what was the meaning of her fearing the man under one name, and liking him—she had said she and James "had great fun"—under another?

Geraldine could not pretend to arrive at a clue to the mystery unaided; but by the time the dinner-bell rang she fancied that she would be able to grope her way to one by means of a letter she intended to write.

In the mean time, braced up by her new resolution, she could give her attention to

studying the man who had acquired such a mysterious and dangerous influence over James, and who seemed also to have established some ascendancy over her husband. But her wits fell blunted by the so-called doctor's stolid impenetrability. He spoke very little, he said nothing remarkable; his manners were, to her critical eyes, rather too studiously courteous; he listened very attentively to everything that was said; he drank a great deal, but wine seemed to have no effect upon him whatever; he was just the same cold, handsome, courteous, dignified statue as he held open the door for the ladies at the end of dinner as he had been when it began. But Miss Eleanor, who had seen him before, noticed a change in him, and remarked upon it as soon as the three ladies reached the drawing-room.

"What a strange man Doctor Ledbury is, Elizabeth!" she said. "You know how terribly afraid of him I was last time. Well, this time he doesn't frighten me at all! He seemed so much more assured, so much more commanding when he came in his professional capacity than he is now that he comes simply on a visit. He

impressed me so much when I first saw him ; and, if I had never seen him before to-day, I don't think I should have thought him anything extraordinary, except that he is very handsome, very handsome. Don't you think so, Geraldine ? ”

“ Yes, he is handsome,” she replied, in a low voice. “ But I don't like his face ; there is no feeling in it. I think I should like him better in marble than in flesh-and-blood.”

Elizabeth took no part in the discussion ; she seemed rather restless and uneasy, snubbed her elder sister two or three times for “ fidgeting,” and kept a close watch on Geraldine's slightest movement. The young lady was expecting every minute to hear the arrival of Mr. Crosse, who had promised to come after dinner ; but then the Waringham party had dined earlier than usual, and she was afraid that the gentlemen would come in before the old doctor made his appearance. Not only was her fear fulfilled, but the evening passed without his coming ; and Geraldine, who had in some measure depended upon him for advice in the maze of doubts and difficulties in which

she found herself, retired to her room filled with a new anxiety. For, if Mr. Crosse deserted her, how was she to prove that foul play, which was her strong card against the self-styled physician?

She locked her door, and, leaning over her writing-table with her head in her hands, tried to mature the plans she had proposed to herself that afternoon; but she was both too weary and too much excited for any work of that sort. Fear of her husband, fear of his accomplice, anxiety lest James should still be within their reach, despair at the isolation in which she found herself, with no ally in the whole household but the stolid Johnson, who respectfully but firmly declined to trust her with the secret of his late master's hiding-place—all assailed her by turns; and, after trying to clear her thoughts by the feeble expedient of opening her window and putting her head out into the chilling air of the November night, she gave up the attempt, and broke down into sobs and tears. She still stood at the window, looking piteously up at the moon and the floating clouds, down at the lawn and the

misty trees, with the dull whining of the wind round the corner of the house filling her ears and deadening her sense of hearing, when a sound from her door, as if some one had pushed against it, drew a cry of fear from her. She turned from the window to watch and to listen, without, however, leaving the place where she stood. Anything might happen in this house while it was haunted by the presence of a cold-blooded poisoner like the so-called Doctor Ledbury, and of a madman as dangerous as her husband had seemed to her that night. Both gentlemen had stayed long over their wine; but when they came to the drawing-room Doctor Ledbury was as cold and as hard of face as ever, while Captain Morrison's pale, dark face had been flushed, and the sullen gleam of his eyes had prepared his frightened wife for a possible outbreak of fury.

She still stood by the window, therefore, and glanced out to note the distance from the sill to the soft lawn underneath, in case of an emergency; but no attempt was made to force her door, or even to open it; and in a few

minutes she heard the soft sounds of footsteps creeping away. Then she went round the bed towards the door to listen; but, as soon as she approached it, she saw what the object of the soft-footed visitor had been. On the floor was a piece of paper that had been pushed under the door. She snatched it up and carried it to the candles. With a great shock of terror and joy and tenderness, she recognized, at the bottom of a scrawl in pencil which filled both sides of the half-sheet of paper, the signature, "James Otway." For a moment her eyes swam, and she could not read; then she recovered herself, and made out the following words—

"MY DEAR DELDEE,

"I can't leave this old dungeon for the last time without saying good-bye to you somehow; and, as I must not see you, I have to do it by means of a scrawl which you will scarcely be able to read, the light is so bad now on the top of the house, where I have passed the day like a carrier-pigeon, ever since Johnson bundled me up there this

morning. He said your husband had come—that he had heard where I was found, was jealous, and swore he would shoot you if I was really James Otway! Johnson said he was going to say I was a burglar. I can't make head or tail of all this; but he was in such an awful fright, trembling from head to foot, that I had to humour him, though I told him I didn't at all like being chivied about in this fashion. Your husband must be very unreasonable if he can be angry at my coming to see you, since we were brought up together, and the doctor can prove that I was under the influence of a narcotic when I instinctively made my way to my old room. I think there has been some curse upon me from the time you left England to go to Havre, Deldee. You have always lived since in my thoughts as my good fairy; but you have been too far away to save me from my own cursed folly and ill-luck. For it is ill-luck. I left Waringham after my uncle's death, resolved to fight myself free from the awful charge brought upon me, and to come back and tell my sister that her sweet faith in me was not



all unfounded. But I have been sucked down in spite of every effort, and Heaven knows that what strength I have in me I have used in the face of broken health and ruined hopes, but without one breath of success. I shall try once more, Deldee. I am going back to my one only friend besides you in the world, to pull round a bit before I make my last effort to go to Ireland and get to the root of this wretched mystery. I must not see your sweet face again now; but, if I only succeed in getting this infamous charge disproved, and Lindley Fielding brought to book for an attempt which is, I am sure, his doing, I will come boldly to Waringham in my own proper person and show your husband that there is no disgrace on the head of

“Your unlucky brother,

“JAMES OTWAY.”

“No disgrace? No disgrace? Then perhaps my husband has been deceived about his sister, after all!” was Geraldine’s first thought, on reaching the last line of this letter, which she pressed to her lips and on her breast with

thanks to Heaven in her heart. Then she sprang up, unlocked her door, and slipped quietly down the back staircase. James had gone that way, she could tell by the slight sounds of his footsteps in descending. A rush of cold air at the bottom directed her to one of the doors at the back of the house in the west wing. He had left it ajar, for fear of making a noise in shutting it; but the wind blew it backwards and forwards with a creaking and banging which would certainly have roused attention if any one had slept near. These sounds frightened Geraldine at first; but, gathering her courage when she recognized the cause of them, she ran lightly along the stone passage and looked out. In front of the door was a path, which turned sharply to the left round one of those great clumps of untrimmed evergreens which are planted at the backs of big houses to hide the unornamental walls and windows of the outbuildings. To the right was the wall of the stable-yard. She crept out to the end of the evergreens, shivering, and looked eagerly down the path as far as she could see the faint, light band of gravel

in the deep shadow cast by the rustling trees. She called in a whisper, "James!" but got no answer; she had waited too long over his letter; and, with a heavy sigh, she turned back towards the house. She did not dare to search the grounds further, on the chance of finding him, to give him the comfort and warning without which it seemed so terrible for him again to go forth to court the very danger he had just escaped. If the wind should shut the door through which she had come, she would be more fatally lost than James and without having done anything to save him. So, with her teeth chattering, she returned; as she reached the door, she saw a light in the passage.

For one moment she thought it might be James who was carrying it; on the impulse, she started forward, and the candle, raised suddenly, showed her the dark face of her husband, looking more menacing than ever in, the flickering light.

"Where have you been?" he hissed.

With a sharp cry she staggered back, rushed out wildly into the garden again, and buried

herself among the evergreens to the left of the path. She heard him come quickly out, heard the door close sharply behind him, heard his oath, and then his quick steps on the gravel. He passed her, going slowly and listening as he went. For a moment she felt relieved; but the next she remembered that it was still impossible for her to regain the house, as the door was shut. Then a thought caused her to start and almost to cry out, for Captain Morrison, having rapidly made up his mind as to the course he would pursue, began running down the path towards the gate at that end of the park. As this was probably the way James had gone, he must come upon him sooner or later if he went on. So she rushed out of her hiding-place and called "Philip!" He turned, and came back to where she stood quite still, waiting like a child for some awful punishment she did not know of.

"Now perhaps you will give me some explanation of this," he said between his teeth.

"I—I cannot," she whispered faintly, and turned her eyes to his face with a look of shuddering, unutterable terror which cut him

like a knife. "You can—you can do what you like to me."

"You deserve something worse than anything I can do," he muttered, in a voice that was choked and hoarse with fury.

"Well, do what you like," she said almost wearily and scarcely above her breath.

But, as he made a movement towards her, with what intent she did not know, she fell in a heap at his feet.

## CHAPTER V.

WHEN Geraldine opened her eyes, she stared at the dark sky above her, at the dark trees around her for some moments before she recognized the fact that she was alone in the garden, lying on the path. Then she sat up quickly and found that she had been placed upon her husband's coat, and she heard an unromantic kicking at the back door and the noise of stones flung up at the windows; then she heard his voice crying—"Confound the fools!" two or three times; and she was on the point of getting up, when the sound of his footsteps returning towards her brought on another access of terror, and she fell back again and closed her eyes to gain a few moments' consideration as to what excuse she should make to him.

Terror kept her rigid as the dead, as he went down on his knees beside her and put his hand, which she felt was trembling, on her heart ; then she felt his breath upon her face and heard his voice, deep and shaking, whispering—

“ Oh God, she will die out here ! Curse the fools ! ” he added, in a burst of frenzy ; and the next moment she felt his hot tears falling on her cheeks.

A tremor ran through her frame, and he snatched her up with a cry, and held her to his breast, and his loud, sobbing breath came closer and closer as he examined her face in the faint moonlight, and called her softly, and pressed her to him as if his passionate touch could thrill her with life.

“ Geraldine ! Great Heavens, she must be dead, if she can't even make an effort to repulse me,” growled he, with such plaintive, heart-broken bitterness that she said weakly—

“ I'm not dead ; ” and instinctively, without knowing what she did, she put out a hand to free herself.

He instantly withdrew the support of his arms, and she fell back, and then got on to

her feet. She could not walk steadily for the first few moments; but he made no attempt to help her. Glancing at her askance, with an expression which was half-surly, half-wistful, he stalked on towards the house in a dignified manner, which in a little man in shirt-sleeves was rather comical. Then she saw him shiver, and remembering why he was cold, she went back, picked up the coat on which she had been lying, and, overtaking him, said dutifully—

“I—I am afraid you have caught cold.”

“Psha!” exclaimed the little officer, haughtily. “I’ve slept many a night on the ground. Thank you,” he added, taking it from her. “Confound the idiots!” And, picking up a stone, he smashed one of the upper windows and produced a shrill scream.

“Hallo!” he shouted, not caring now how much noise he made in his anxiety to get his shivering wife safely inside. “Come down some of you, just as you are, at once, and open the front door, or you’ll all get a month’s notice to-morrow.”

After a few minutes, a head appeared at the window, and, repeating his order with a



little more emphasis, Captain Morrison turned to his wife and said—

“You had better come round. If we go in this way, the whole house will get the burglar-fever again.” And he marched round to the front of the house while Geraldine meekly followed.

It was the cook who let them in, and shyly offered them a candle, her master having let his drop outside the back door as he heard it close behind him. She then shuffled hastily off. By the light, as he turned it towards his wife, Captain Morrison saw that she was white to the lips and shivering.

“You are ill!” he cried anxiously. “Sit down and let me call the doctor to see you.”

All the old terror came back upon her as she shrank away, whispering, “No, no; for Heaven’s sake, don’t call him!”

“Why not?” he asked abruptly. “You ought to like him, since he has been such a good friend to that precious scoundrel you are so fond of.”

She sank down upon her chair and buried

her face in her hands; this strange reference by her husband to his accomplice confused even more than it shocked her. He misinterpreted the action, and continued savagely—

“I know it was to see him you went out to-night; you expected to meet him; but you see his affection is not proof against fear of the husband he no doubt despises.”

She raised her head to answer him; she wanted to assure him that she could prove that James had no thought of doing him harm by word or deed; but the hopelessness of an argument on this point against his fierce prejudices and rooted convictions stopped her. She got up, and moved with staggering steps towards the inner hall; but it was in vain that he tried to stiffen himself against the sight of her weakness; she had not reached the staircase before he was by her side again.

“There is no fireplace in that wretched room of yours; come to my room just for a few minutes; there is a nice fire there.” She shook her head. “I don’t want to get you there to frighten you again; I shall be in the dressing-room while you stay,” said he impatiently.

"No, thank you, I am not cold; and I want to go to bed; I am tired."

So they reached the top of the stairs; and she, worn out, unhappy, remembering the snub she had got that afternoon when she offered him her cheek, shyly put out her hand; but he looked at her white, wan face, and bit his quivering lower lip, and just touched her hand and let it fall, and turned sharply away. She went on towards her own room in complete indifference as to his action; but she had not been there two minutes before there was a knock at her door, and in reply to her whisper, "Who is it?" her husband's voice whispered back—

"It's I—Philip. Open the door. Don't be afraid; I'm not coming in."

The words were spoken irritably, but it was not in his irritable moods that she feared him. She unlocked the door, and found him with a cigar in his mouth and a thick fur rug piled up in his arms.

"There! You had better put that over you, and then you won't take cold"—and he looked at her over it shyly but haughtily.

"Thank you very much," she answered gently, wakened at last to the fact that his fury had not been wreaked upon her so savagely as she had expected. "I—I am afraid it is you who have caught cold, and not I."

Indeed, he looked as if he had, and his pale face, with dark marks under the eyes and livid lips, was anything but attractive.

"Oh no ; I'm all right, thank you !"—but still he stayed.

"I—I hope you will have a good night's rest," said she civilly.

"Thank you. It will be as good a one as I deserve, I dare say ; and, if I lie awake and curse my ill-luck, why, it won't interfere with your night's rest, at any rate."

This speech was meant to be dry and bitter, but a break of the voice on the last words made it plaintive. The tears came into Geraldine's eyes. She flung the rug down, ran out, and kissed him with both arms round his neck.

"You've been very kind," she whispered. "Good night."

And she ran back into her room and shut the door, fearing lest another outbreak of anger

or jealousy on his part should frighten her and make her regret the impulse which had at last closed the somewhat trying interview peacefully. She heard nothing for a few moments ; then he came close to the door and called her softly ; but before she could answer he had walked away.

Yet the remembrance of his visit and of his last words had impressed her so strongly that all through a night in which she rested very badly, whenever she woke up she fancied she heard her husband's steps up and down the corridor, stopping for a few moments whenever they reached her door.

The next morning she felt heavy and stupid ; but, retaining a vivid remembrance of the events of the night before, she began to wonder whether it was possible that a man who had been so kind as—in the face of the provocation her conduct had undoubtedly given him—her husband had certainly shown himself, could connive at such an inhuman scheme for getting rid of a man he hated as that to which James had nearly fallen a victim. When she came down to breakfast, she found that, in spite of his boasts, he was suffering from a

violent cold ; but he greeted her so kindly and watched her so solicitously during the meal that she half resolved to take the bold course of appealing to his generosity, confessing her deep anxiety to see James's innocence established, and even asking him to help her. Then, if he would only receive her appeal kindly, the awful barrier which now stood between them might be removed, and she could try to yield him that wifely love and duty which he still, under all his schemes for revenge, seemed most humanly to crave.

But just as she was making a hesitating step to the window where Captain Morrison stood, when breakfast was over, lighting his cigar, Doctor Ledbury, who had been watching her as vigilantly, if not as tenderly, as her husband, anticipated her by speaking a few words in a low voice to his host, who instantly went with him through the conservatory into the garden. Geraldine watched them with dull eyes, feeling that this interview boded ill to her plan. However, she contrived to meet her husband alone soon after his return with the doctor to the house ; but the cloud of anger and mistrust had again

settled on his face, and she did not dare even to attempt to dispel it. So she went up to her own room—for the old schoolroom, which had been fitted up as a boudoir for her, was not sacred from Elizabeth's intrusion—and after some thought, wrote the following letter—

“MY DEAR ADA,

“I enclose a photograph you gave me in the old times, as token that neither you nor Lindley have anything further to fear from me. I am so ill that I cannot write myself, ill from a cause I do not dare to name to you ; but I want you to tell Lindley that the doctor in whom he trusted, betrayed his confidence, that I hold the proofs of this, and that I mean to use them. I cannot believe that Lindley was a party to this treatment of me ; the best thing he can now do for himself is to confide everything to Mrs. Morrison, who is writing this for me, and who is one of my witnesses to the cause of my illness. For the sake of the family, if for no other, she would take care that Lindley should not suffer, if he would help her by telling the whole story now. But, if he does not do

this, it can scarcely fail to go hard with him in the investigation which will soon be opened.

“Yours very sincerely,

“HARRY HAMMOND.”

Geraldine was at first in some doubt about the signature; but, as she had never seen James's signature of his assumed name, and as she was a little diffident about committing a forgery, she simply signed the name in her own handwriting, as if the sender of the letter had been too ill to hold a pen at all. Before despatching this she determined to see Mr. Crosse; so she ordered the brougham for twelve, and ran through the wood as fast as she could towards his house. It was now half-past eleven.

As she had expected, the appearance of Captain Morrison and the disappearance of James—facts of which Johnson, the butler at the Hall, had informed him within a few hours of their occurrence, had made him cautious of interference in the matter. He was quite as firm as ever in his denial of the possibility of a league between a gentleman and a poisoner,



and the conclusion to which the appearance of Doctor Ledbury with the master of the Hall led him was that James, who had fully qualified himself for the post of scape-goat, had hatched up a story to wake her sympathy for himself. The old doctor begged her not to do anything rash, and strongly advised her to confide everything to her husband.

“Even a bad husband is generally the best counsellor a wife can have, Mrs. Morrison,” said he emphatically, “because, you see, his honour and his interests are bound up in hers. But, with all deference to the different judgment at which I am afraid you have arrived on the matter, I don’t think Captain Morrison is a bad husband, and I am quite sure that he is not a bad man. His head and his heart are both too easily fired; but in the end I fancy that nobody but himself is much the worse for the conflagration.”

To this peroration Geraldine listened attentively, and with about as much show of intending to profit by it as advice against the grain usually produces; and she drove to Goldborough, and with her own hands posted

the letter to Mrs. Fielding. When this first step towards the unravelling of the mystery had been taken, she had leisure to consider another strange aspect of it, and to wonder what was the reason of Doctor Ledbury's remaining at the Hall now that he had satisfied himself that James was no longer there. The latter had told her in his letter that he should return to London to seek his "only friend" again; and Geraldine came to the conclusion that the arrival of James in town at the place where he had left Doctor Ledbury would be the signal for the doctor's departure from Waringham. She therefore resolved on the bold course of setting a detective to watch the doctor's movements as soon as he was out of her sight; and, as in such a matter she felt the need of a man's advice, she determined to find means of consulting Reginald Bamber, who came from town every Saturday evening to spend Sunday at the Vicarage. She thought that by this time her husband's jealousy was sufficiently diverted into another channel for her to be able to do this without difficulty. As this was Saturday, she had not long to wait;

but before the day was over a new source of anxiety growing up in the very midst of the life at the Hall diverted her attention and suggested a nearer field for her investigations.

She returned home just in time for luncheon, and as soon as she was seated at the table, Geraldine asked if any one had been to see Mrs. Symes, who had kept her room since the preceding afternoon; the housekeeper was getting so old now that the office she was reluctant to give up had become almost a sinecure, and an occasional indisposition of a day or two had no disastrous effects on the daily routine of the household.

"I have just come from her room," said Miss Eleanor. "I have been reading to her for nearly an hour to cheer her up; she seems very depressed and melancholy, and won't be left alone. It seems she had Martha to sleep in her room, and as soon as the girl went away she sent for Susan."

"Poor old lady! I should think high spirits never were her strong point," said Captain Morrison. "I suppose you found her difficult to amuse, Miss Otway?"

“I did not try to amuse her, Captain Morrison; I did my best to comfort her, as she seemed uneasy in mind. I am sure. I don't know what she can have to reproach herself with. As far as our human eyes can see, she seems to have led as blameless a life as our frailty will permit.”

“Mental uneasiness, due to bodily infirmity probably,” said Doctor Ledbury. “I will go up this afternoon and see if a prescription will not aid the effect of your consolation, Miss Otway.”

“Oh no, Doctor Ledbury, I must beg you not to, really. I suggested that she should have advice, and you cannot imagine what a distressing effect it had upon her. There is nothing seriously the matter with her, and now she is so old I believe the idea of seeing a doctor makes her think she must be going to die. She quite frightened me by the contortions of her face and limbs when I spoke to her about it.”

Captain Morrison laughed; so did the doctor himself.

“She seems to have formed an unflattering opinion of your profession, doctor.”

But to more than one of the ladies it occurred that the name of Doctor Ledbury recalled to the housekeeper the illness and death of her old master. To Geraldine this idea was so suggestive that a light broke over her face as it entered her mind. Eleanor continued the conversation in her own way with the somewhat trite reflections which occurred to her—

“It is curious how much more loudly conscience seems to cry out in innocent people than in guilty ones. She asked me to read something about the punishments of Heaven on evil-doers; and, when I read her some of the Psalms, she seemed much excited at the passages where David curses his enemies, the wicked.”

“But I should think she applied the curses to her enemies, the wicked, too.”

“Oh, Captain Morrison, what enemies can the poor old woman have? I should——”

“That sort of wandering is a common feature of dotage,” interrupted Doctor Ledbury abruptly.

“But she is not in her dotage, I assure you!” persisted Eleanor, rather nettled by the

suggestion, for the housekeeper was very few years older than herself. "Her faculties are perfectly good ; but she has never got over my brother's death ; she cannot bear any allusion to it ; she——" The old lady suddenly remembered that it was an awkward topic to have introduced, since she could not well pursue, before the physician who had attended her brother, the account of the way in which the housekeeper sighed and trembled and shook her head at every mention of Sir Charles's illness.

"The shock of her master's death no doubt hastened her break-up," said Doctor Ledbury. "And I have no hesitation in saying that at that time her intellectual faculties were already in a state of decay."

"Oh, that is because you had not known her before. She has always been like that !" said Eleanor, ingenuously.

"Doctor Ledbury can see signs which escape you and me, Eleanor," said Elizabeth, who saw that their guest's handsome face was contracting at this attempt to argue against his superior knowledge.

"If Miss Otway had been at her brother's bedside at that time, the signs I speak of could hardly have failed to be as apparent to her as to me," said the doctor gravely.

And poor Eleanor was far too much crushed by this united attack to suggest that the physician, having denied admission to the sick-room to her sister, would certainly not have accorded it to herself.

Every one felt relieved when this rather painful episode was brought to an end, and Geraldine opened the discussion of the afternoon arrangements. Captain Morrison wished their guest to see the few beauties of a remarkably unpicturesque neighbourhood, and his wife and Miss Elizabeth were to go also. Geraldine dressed quickly for the drive, in order to get a few minutes' talk with Mrs. Symes; but, quick as she was, Elizabeth had forestalled her, a fact which suggested that the household bogey, in whose presence the housekeeper was of course mute, had been put on guard; for the mysterious doctor was on quite as good terms with the younger Miss Otway as with his host. She tried again, on

her return, to get a *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Symes ; but on this occasion it was the doctor himself who met her at the foot of the staircase, and rather abruptly suggested that the old woman had better not be subjected to the excitement of any more visits that day.

"If indeed you insist on going up to her, Mrs. Morrison, I will take the liberty of accompanying you," he said, in a tone so strange, with such a calm suggestion of secret power, that she faltered, and, instead of persisting, said—

"Have you seen her?"

"Not yet," he answered quietly. "I was afraid, after what Miss Otway said at dinner, that the sight of me would do her more harm than good. However, if it would set your mind at rest——"

"No!" said she sharply ; and then she paused.

It was the first time she had met Doctor Ledbury alone, and the total change of his manner towards her bewildered and alarmed her. He was no longer statuesquely cold, reserved, courteous ; his face and attitude



expressed nothing but insulting defiance. She considered for a few moments as she stood under his impertinent scrutiny, and then she raised her head, and said quietly—

“It is very good of you to take such an interest in the poor old thing, Doctor Ledbury, and I dare say you are right about the excitement. I will get the Vicar to come and see her, for I can give you my word his discourses are not of an exciting kind.”

And, with a smile, she turned away; but he followed her.

“Mrs. Morrison, if you will allow me, I have something to say to you.” His voice was raised above its usual almost inaudible tones, and sounded harsh and strident. But she pretended not to hear, and hastened along the corridor towards the front staircase, on which she could hear her husband’s footsteps coming up. At that moment, in her anxiety to escape from the doctor, who, in those few moments of unreserve, had made a profound impression upon her by the unexpected assumption of the boldest confidence in look and tone, she was ready to welcome the appearance of

any one to break up the *tête-à-tête*. But, before Captain Morrison came in sight, Doctor Ledbury had caught her up in a couple of strides, and whispered close to her ear, as she shrank away, "Why put it off? I tell you I will speak to you alone; and the sooner you give me an opportunity the better it will be for—some one you are interested in."

"You had better say what you have to say to my husband, whom I shall at once inform of your remarkable change of manner."

"Oh, do so, by all means! Tell your husband—your loving husband—that I have insulted you; and then he will kick me out of the house, and I shall be free to set about some business I have on hand."

She gave a cry, started forward, and almost fell against her husband, who had just set foot on the top stair.

"Hallo, what's the matter?" he asked.

For a moment she hesitated, confused and breathless, as her husband drew her towards him and looked anxiously into her frightened eyes. Then, glancing behind her, she saw that Doctor Ledbury had disappeared; but

the influence of his hard face and voice was upon her still, his last words had borne a horrible meaning to her, and she dared not betray him. Her husband was caressing her, not prepared for any awful disclosure.

"What is the matter?" he repeated, whispering the words close to her ear.

"Oh, nothing! I came upon you unexpectedly," she faltered.

"Well, I'm not an ogre! Who were you talking to? I heard some one talking."

"Only Doctor Ledbury. He told me I had better not disturb Mrs. Symes; I thought I should just have time to go and see how she is before dinner. Now I must go and dress."

After the first moment of impulsive gladness to get away from Doctor Ledbury, her usual constraint towards her husband had returned.

"You are in a great hurry to get away from me," said he, with some bitterness, without, however, releasing her. "Look here! You are so frank in your undutifulness, and so loyal to yourself in your disloyalty to me, that they haven't been able to make me hate you or even really doubt you—yet; but, if you persist

in repulsing me—me—your husband—whom you seem to forget you have sworn to love as well as obey, why, why, I shall end by cutting somebody's throat—not my own, for that I don't suppose you would mind !”

“Yes, I should, Philip ; yes, I should,” she cried hurriedly. “I must tell you, I—I wanted to speak to you this morning, only I couldn't get the chance. I had something very important to say to you. I——”

The words froze on her lips ; for, as she stood there, with her husband's arm round her, and with one of her hands laid persuasively on his shoulder, her face lovely with the light and colour which the excitement of confusion brought there, a step behind her made her start, and her husband withdrew his arm. Doctor Ledbury appeared, smiling urbanely from the turn in the corridor.

“Have you dropped a letter, Mrs. Morrison ?” he asked, in his usual soft voice, and with his usual dignified manner.

Geraldine could not repress a slight start, and a still more tell-tale rush of blood to her face. Her husband noticed both signs, and his

dark face became livid as hers became red. The doctor proceeded imperturbably, apparently noticing none of these things.

"Because I have just picked up a letter from the floor ; I don't know whose it is."

Before he handed it to her, Geraldine had entirely recovered herself, and was able to take it from him with an air of perfect indifference. It was a half-sheet of a letter from which the beginning was missing ; it was in an unknown hand, and the signature was that of a man she had never heard of.

"No, it is not mine," she answered quietly, with inward rage at having been tricked. For she felt sure that it was part of one of his own letters.

It had done its work, however ; it had produced in her a guilty start which far more than counterbalanced in its effects on her husband's mind that weak attempt at confidence which the doctor had interrupted.

It had done more than this, for it had given Geraldine a speedy and convincing proof that the man's insolent words to her contained more than an idle threat, that he was a strategist

of resource, an enemy to be feared. She glanced from his bland, treacherous face, calm, smiling, and handsome, to the savage frown of her husband ; and the candid anger which distorted the features of the latter seemed suddenly attractive and noble in her eyes ; and in that moment she was amazed to think that she had ever looked upon Doctor Ledbury as her husband's tool in a base and cowardly crime. But as the two men went downstairs together, the doctor murmuring speeches she could not hear, in his low, persuasive voice, into her husband's ear, she asked herself whether the converse of that position was not more dangerous still.

## CHAPTER VI.

As she had been prepared to expect, Geraldine found no opportunity during the rest of the day of seeing either Mrs. Symes or her husband alone. As for the latter, while her belief in his innocence of the real character of the man whom he had brought to Waringham as his guest grew stronger every hour, and her anxiety to enlighten him increased in the same proportion, she soon found that this step had become practically as impossible as if there had been a distance of a hundred miles between them. The anger and suspicion against her which showed themselves in every look and word while she was in his presence had raised up a barrier which her efforts were now as powerless to break down as his had formerly been to storm the fortress of dislike in which

she had obstinately entrenched herself. From the moment when, in the company of Doctor Ledbury, Captain Morrison left his wife in the corridor, and went downstairs towards the library, the impulses of tenderness which a few gracious words or a sign of distress on her part had hitherto been able to rouse in him seemed dead. When they met again at dinner, she saw at once the effects of the doctor's influence in her husband's mocking expression as he looked at her, and in the cut-and-dried sneers at women with which he, with bad taste unusual in him, garnished his share in the general conversation.

When, later in the evening, she tried the device of playing his favourite music, spirited marches, pretty waltzes, he failed, as he had never before failed, to express appreciation of the compliment. Doctor Ledbury made a courteous attempt to atone for this neglect. Leaving the rest gathered round the fireplace in the long drawing-room, he crossed the room to the corner where Geraldine sat at the piano; and, as if he had entirely forgotten the little episode of a couple of hours ago in the corridor,



expressed his pleasure in her performance in the terms of one who neither knew nor cared much about music. Geraldine received his remarks with coldness, which did not disconcert him in the least.

"For myself," he continued, "I like operatic music best—Italian operatic music."

"*Lucrezia Borgia*, for example," she broke in, looking at him with a quite unmistakable expression of loathing.

He seemed taken aback by this speech, the meaning of which he apparently understood. But his face showed no shame and no anger; his features were indeed naturally so immovable that the faint surprise and inquiry which her implied accusation caused in him were only to be guessed from a jerking movement of the hand he had laid on the piano, and from his momentary silence. His next words were spoken in his usual low voice, but with a threatening snarl.

"Yes, *Lucrezia Borgia* is a very nice opera; it is about poisoning, isn't it?"

The man's cold and brutal boldness struck her with such horror that she could not answer,

could not look at him—her hands fell down from the keys, and her eyes sought her husband at the other end of the room in an impulse which did not escape her companion.

“It is of no use to call your husband ; you have ruined yourself with him. It is I you have to deal with now. If you call him now, what can you say against me that he will believe ? Listen—I have no ill-will against you, luckily for you. But, if you don’t chose to give me an interview some time before Monday morning, where nobody can overhear us, I swear I’ll do Iago’s work between you and your husband, and you know who I shall turn my attention to next. Now call your husband, if you dare.”

He poured out these words quickly, in a low voice, resting easily against the piano, as if he were chatting about the most indifferent matter. Even the expression of his face scarcely changed ; he kept his cold blue eyes upon her with the straight, passionless stare which habitually gave them an air of penetration and superiority to human weakness, but which now seemed to her, as she gave one

swift glance at him, nothing less than the callous apathy of the ruffian. She started up with a sharply drawn breath, her eyes wild, her face pale and damp; but the presence of this man, with his inexhaustible insolence, paralysed her; and his mere whisper—"Take care!" as he stepped back, as if to allow her to pass, was enough to make her sink down again on to the music-stool without uttering a word. Doctor Ledbury picked up some music which she had swept off the piano as she put out her hand in rising.

"Who are you? What are you?" she whispered, as he bent down to replace before her the piece she had been playing.

"You shall know when you give me the interview I have asked for."

"This is an interview. Why can't you say what you have to say now?"

"Because what I have to say to you may cause you some emotion, and I dislike scenes before witnesses. You need not be afraid of me; you can choose your own time and place, or you can refuse altogether to give me the interview, which, however, will be a pity, for the sake of more than one person. Well?"

"I will answer you—to-morrow."

"Very well. But it must be early, because on Monday I shall probably be going away."

Her expression changed to one of acute terror; and, satisfied that he had said enough to gain his point and that to frighten the woman more would be dangerous, he changed his tone as she again rose, and talked easily on indifferent subjects as they returned to the group at the other end of the room.

The rest of the evening passed quietly, but was uncomfortable for every one; for the master of the house, who seemed scarcely able to endure the presence of his wife; for the wife herself, snubbed by him and forced to converse with some semblance of amiability with a man she feared and hated; for Elizabeth, who, during these last two days, had lost some of her self-command and grown uneasy and restless; for Eleanor, on whom her sister's uneasiness found vent; and, possibly, for the imperturbable guest himself, who had several delicate and difficult affairs on hand in the Waringham household.

The following day was Sunday. Geraldine

put her last hope on the possibility of a conversation with Reginald Bamber, the only cool-headed and trustworthy friend she had. As she could not get an opportunity of speaking to him privately as they came out of church, she boldly asked him to luncheon; and he returned with the Hall party. Before the meal was half over, Geraldine had the satisfaction of seeing that this move was a wise one; for the first time since his arrival at Waringham, Doctor Ledbury, in the presence of the Vicar's son, seemed ill at ease. After luncheon, Doctor Ledbury himself gave her the opportunity she wanted by lingering behind with Captain Morrison, over whom his influence continued to increase, when they strolled out into the garden to enjoy the fleeting warmth and brightness of an afternoon fair for late November. As soon as she had drawn a little way ahead with Reginald, she said hurriedly—

“I want you to help me. I am in such terrible distress and anxiety that I cannot even think.”

“You know very well that I shall be most happy to do anything I can——”

"Yes, yes, I know," she interrupted gratefully, not in the least rebuffed by the calm commonplace of his speech. "I don't know whether you will understand—I can't tell you properly—I am afraid of their coming up." She was terribly nervous and excited; so he helped her out with her story.

"You are afraid of your husband's friend, for one thing, I can see."

"Oh, yes, I am, and with terrible reason! He has tried to kill James; it is true, indeed it is. Do pretend to believe me, at least. You heard about the burglary here? Well, it wasn't a burglar; it was James. And this man has come in search of him, and when he finds him he will kill him; so I want to have a detective set to watch this 'doctor' when he leaves here; he is going to-morrow."

"Isn't he the doctor Mr. Fielding brought to see Sir James?"

"Yes; but I don't believe he is a doctor at all."

"That is very likely. Have you told your husband your suspicions?"

"No. It would be of no use. They are

inseparable. At first I thought the man was a tool of my husband's ; but now I am sure he is not, he is too wicked ; my husband will end by being a tool of his."

"You must prevent that. You must tell Captain Morrison your suspicions ; you must——"

"I cannot. This man has already made the breach between us wider than it was before ; he is so confident of his power in the house that he threatens to exasperate my husband still further against me unless I give him a secret interview. He declares he has something important to tell me. I don't know what to do."

"You must speak to your husband without the man's knowledge——"

"That is impossible."

"You must find a way. And then you must tell him everything, not keeping back the least thing about James or any one else." She shook her head hopelessly. "I tell you you must. What ? You would rather give this infamous impostor an interview, in which he might frighten you out of your life, than throw yourself into the hands of a man of

such generous impulses as your husband? No breach between you could justify such a course, and nothing in the world is so likely to heal the breach as an opportunity of this kind for you to appeal to his kindness."

"But I tell you I have tried to get an opportunity, and I cannot. They are together from morning till night."

"But not from night till morning. Give me your word that before breakfast-time to-morrow you will have found means of seeing your husband alone, and of using them to make a full confession of all you have done for James, and all you know about the doctor; and in return I will promise to do my very utmost to bring this scoundrel—I believe, you see, that he is a scoundrel—to justice. But, if you refuse to give me your word, why then I am afraid I must say that any attempt to help you would be useless and dangerous, and I should have to decline to make it."

"Oh, you are cruel!"

"Will you give me your word?"

"My husband will kill me! You must have noticed how he looks at me now."



"Will you give me your word?"

She struggled with herself, and then answered—

"Yes. I don't believe I shall be alive at breakfast-time to-morrow now," she added piteously.

"Very well. Go to him, prepared for the worst, if you like. You know very well the worst will be a long way short of that. And, in return, you have my promise."

She looked up at him, relieved in mind already now that she was pledged to a course of action; and she wondered, with bitter remorse, how she could ever have dared to slight this man's love to accept her husband's. But the latter would hardly have been jealous, had he even known of this feeling; for the sentiment which caused her to look up with gratitude, too shy and too deep to be easily expressed, was not so much regret at having missed a noble love, as remorse at having committed a sacrilege. He began talking about old Miss Gretton, asking whether she had heard from her lately, to give Mrs. Morrison an opportunity of recovering her self-com-

mand before. they joined her husband and Doctor Ledbury. As, soon after, he left, to return to the Vicarage, Reginald gave her hand a firm pressure to remind her of her promise and of his own, and to encourage her to a firmness which, as she thus took leave of her only friend, she was far from feeling.

During the rest of the day, during which, in spite of her pallor and of her haggard, anxious looks, her husband never looked at or spoke to her kindly, she carefully avoided the *tête-à-tête* which Doctor Ledbury as carefully sought. As the evening wore on, she grew flushed and nervous, and distressed Eleanor very much by the oddly inappropriate remarks she made on some zenana mission reports which the old lady was reading out to her.

"Really, Geraldine, you are answering as if you did not feel the least interest in the good work these Christian ladies are carrying on out there," she complained peevishly.

"Yes, I do indeed, Aunt Eleanor," answered Geraldine, rallying her thoughts, and, in her haste to appear interested, unwisely letting fall her real opinions on the subject. "Don't you

think the air of superiority these good mission-women, who would only pass for half-educated and particularly narrow-minded people over here, give themselves over the Indian ladies, must be a drawback to their success?"

"But they are superior, Geraldine. They are Christians, and they are English. And, if they are half-educated, why, the Indian ladies are not educated at all."

"I should like to go out there and find out whether that is so."

"Geraldine! You! Leave your home and your husband! What would Captain Morrison say?"

"He would say," said that gentleman, wheeling his chair round and looking full into his wife's face for the first time that day, "that she is very welcome to go if she pleases."

Though Eleanor took this for a jest, the tone in which it was spoken made her rather uncomfortable; but the words, coming at the moment when she was summoning her courage for the ordeal of a crucial interview with him, cut Geraldine like a knife. For a few moments she told herself that it was impossible to keep

her promise ; but the sight of the imperturbable doctor, stroking his beard and talking softly to Elizabeth in the contented belief that he held the conduct of affairs in the house safely in his hands, nerved her again to the contest. When the ladies retired that night, leaving the gentlemen to go and smoke a last cigar in the library, Geraldine fled upstairs with loudly-beating heart, and, without summoning Aurélie, exchanged the rustling silk gown she wore for a cashmere dressing-gown, slipped softly through the corridor to her husband's room, and secreted herself in the big cupboard between the window and the fireplace. It seemed to her a very long time before she heard any sound but the faint crackling of the fire ; when at last she heard the shutting of a door downstairs, soon afterwards the voices of her husband and his guest, and the footsteps of the former coming towards his door, her breath came so fast and her heart beat so loudly that she fancied he would detect her presence as soon as he entered the room. But she was mistaken ; he came in, locked the door, walked sharply to the fireplace, wheeled the

armchair that stood by the hearthrug round to the fire, and threw himself into it. She had left the cupboard-door open by about half an inch, and she cautiously widened the aperture a little more under cover of the noise made by these movements of his. For he sat with his back to the cupboard, whence she could now watch him with impunity. She saw him take something from one of his pockets and bend over it intently. From the sound of the turning of the leaves she knew he was reading something; by his impatient movements and ejaculations she guessed that it was something which excited and angered him. Her curiosity to learn what it was that occupied his attention rose high; and, when he started up, dashing down on the floor what looked to her like a large pocket-book, and hissing out "Curse him!" as he began pacing up and down the room, she grew so anxious that, in spite of the terror his fierce mood inspired in her, it was with difficulty that she restrained herself from rushing out from her hiding-place to gain possession of the interesting book. But upon this impulse followed the reflection that

it would be useless if not dangerous to appeal to him now; and she had almost decided to wait until he retired to his dressing-room, at the door of which he was already standing, when his mood suddenly changed, she heard him heave a long sigh, and the next moment she saw him return to the fireplace, throw himself again in the armchair, and lean forward with his elbows upon his knees and his head in his hands.

Geraldine watched him anxiously, a feeling of pity for him mingling with her fear, as she recalled Mr. Crosse's opinion that he himself was the worst sufferer from the heat of his own temperament. It was evident, as he remained still and silent in the same position, that the fury she had witnessed in his face a few minutes ago had given place to some feeling probably as deep, but less violently demonstrative; and she decided that she must consider this an opportunity.

Captain Morrison was startled in the midst of his reflections by a light touch, a perfume of violets, a low whisper, all meeting his senses at once. He raised his head and saw his wife

kneeling on the floor by the side of his chair, very pale, very timid, with imploring eyes.

"Philip!" she repeated, as he stared at her without any change from the dead look of stern, hopeless misery his features had worn before her appearance.

Again he did not answer. This reception alarmed her more than an outburst of anger would have done. She put her hand again upon his arm and said tremulously—

"Won't you speak to me? Don't be angry with me. I have come to do what is right, to tell you everything you want to know, to ask you to forgive me for what I have done wrong."

He shrugged his shoulders with a guttural exclamation which he meant for a laugh, and shook her hand off and rose from the chair, as if by an effort.

"You are too modest. You have done no wrong. You have shown proper spirit to a tyrant. You have been loyal—unflinchingly loyal to a worthless and vicious man, in spite of reason, in spite of his desertion, in spite of the advances of a husband once foolish enough

to love you. Your conduct is more than right ; it is heroic !”

He did not look at her, and, as he finished speaking, he turned to the mantelpiece and, with a sudden assumption of indifference to the subject under discussion, proceeded to wind up the travelling-clock which stood there : but he broke the spring. His wife got up from the floor and watched him, with her hand resting on the back of the chair from which he had risen. After a few minutes' silence, she began again—

“Won't you listen to me kindly, Philip ?”

“If you have anything to say, you can say it, of course ; and I must hear it, since you have forced your way into my room for that purpose.”

“I cannot speak out while you answer me so coldly ; it paralyzes me !”

“Ah ! So you have found that out now. By Jove, I wish I had used your weapon before !”

“And if I have forced my way into your room, surely that is not such a great liberty in your wife !”

“My wife—my wife ! But you are not my wife, madam !” he burst out, with fiery eyes, his indifference gone and his forbearance with



it. "What! A woman who shudders if my hand touches hers, who thinks she yields me an inestimable favour if she offers a cold cheek to my yearning lips, or submits, stiff as a figure of wax, to the passionate pressure of my arms! A woman who keeps her sighs, her tears, her sympathy, her kisses too, for all I know, for a scoundrel escaped from his right place among the scum of the earth! A woman who hates me, deceives me, wounds me, and would give her eyes to be able to despise me too! And who might have succeeded in that—for, God knows, I was fool enough to have some sort of faith—some sort of trust through it all—if luckily my eyes had not been opened to my own folly. I forgive your intrusion as the privileged impertinence of a spoilt woman; but the right to enter my room you forfeited when you left it, in spite of my earnest entreaties, of your own accord."

This outburst shocked Geraldine and almost stunned her. Reflection had suggested to her lately that the fault of the breach between them was not all on one side; sorrow had made her more sympathetic towards the sorrow

of others. His case against her was startlingly strong in the way he put it; and there was enough of truth in it, even to her, to make her feel guilty and look humble as he ended his fiery protest. Naturally, however, the woman had plenty to say for herself still.

"Then, if I'm not your wife, Philip," she began again slowly, and in a seductively gentle and faltering voice, "of course you can hear me more impartially. And, as what I have to tell you, therefore, won't interest you much, I can tell it quickly and go away and leave you in peace."

She made a slight pause here; but all he said was—

"Well?"

"I wish to say that the man who broke into the house on Thursday night was not a burglar, but James Otway."

"I knew that."

"The suspicions you cast upon him and me are wholly without foundation. He is ruined, hunted, broken-down; he looks upon me as the sister I have been to him since he found me, a baby-child, twenty years ago." Here her husband gave her a look of the most eloquent

incredulity ; but she continued—"If I had not found out your cruel intentions towards him, you would never have had reason for a moment's jealousy of him or anybody else."

"I think your notions of a woman's duties as a sister and duties as a wife have got rather mixed," said he drily.

"Not more than yours as a husband and as an executioner !"

He turned upon her sharply.

"You forget. I offered to give up the one *rôle* or the other ; it was you yourself who decided which of the two I should keep."

"Give me the choice again, Philip. I know better now—I know you better now," she pleaded, not lovingly indeed, but with the meekness of despairing misery.

"I think not. You don't know me at all well, if you think I mistake the nature of the feelings which prompt you. When I offered to sacrifice my revenge for you, your hatred of me was stronger than your fear, and showed itself in the manner of your reply with a plainness I can never forget. Now that fortune has put proofs against you into my hands, your fear

has grown even stronger than your hatred, and would perhaps enable you, if I were as blind as I once was, to deceive me for a few moments—long enough to get an oath from me—into the belief that there was some spark of womanly gratitude down in your heart. But I am not blind now, or so foolish as to make any mistake about the amount of your regard for me.”

He poured out his words vehemently and without pause; but the sobs into which she broke, without attempting to interrupt him, disturbed him and caused his voice to become a little uneven before he came to the end.

“What—what proo-oofs do you mean?” she sobbed, getting to the pith of his discourse through all her emotion.

He picked up the pocket-book which she had forgotten, and said shortly—

“Perhaps that will satisfy you.”

She dried her eyes and opened it without any appearance of trepidation; for, after all, there was nothing very serious now that her husband did not know. It was a pocket-book very similar to the older one she had examined just after her guardian’s death, and which she

now knew had belonged to James in his assumed name of Harry Hammond. This one contained entries made in the same scrawling, unrecognizable hand, and in the same irregular and unmethodical fashion, and she was startled to find that there were frequent passages in which she herself, as "Deldee," was alluded to with fervour and fondness, of which James's somewhat constrained manner when in her presence had given no indication. Her husband saw her start, and gave a savage exclamation—

"Perhaps you will deny that 'H. H.' is James Otway, or that 'Deldee' is Geraldine Morrison?"

"No, I shall not," said she promptly, looking up now quite calmly. "But I should like to know who told you so."

"That has nothing to do with it. It is enough that this diary shows distinctly that James Otway is in love with you, which you have denied; and——"

"But stop!" she interrupted, shaking with emotion which was no longer fear of her husband. "This proves nothing but James's loyalty. It shows that he is much fonder of

me than I thought—than he ever let me see that he was. You must have seen just now that I was surprised—astonished. I swear to you he never let me believe he cared for me so much—— I——”

“You talk as if it were a very noble thing to love another man’s wife and drivel out maudlin sentiment about her in a diary like a school-girl. Perhaps this will change your view of the matter.” He snatched the pocket-book impatiently from her hands and pointed out to her another leaf in the diary, on which was the following entry—

“Saw the wife who was not my wife to-day, almost without any feeling whatever. Seems rather soon to have got over it. Fickleness or philosophy—which?”

Geraldine read it and lifted her head quickly.

“That entry does not refer to your sister, as you think. In a few days, I believe I shall be able to prove to you who it does refer to. In the mean time, doesn’t it seem to you strange that in these entries, which date, I see, from last July, the time when you believe James and your sister to have been travelling abroad to-

gether, there should be no other reference which can be supposed to apply to her ? ”

“ The person who gave me this pocket-book owned to having torn out some leaves, which, he said—I—I mean—which could only have caused me unnecessary pain. You can see that some leaves are missing.”

“ But did not Doctor—the person who gave you this pocket-book—himself direct your attention to that passage about a wife who was no wife ? Ah, I thought so ! ” she cried, as he looked astonished. “ And I am certain those missing leaves were torn out for a very different reason.”

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ That those leaves would have shown enough of the course of James’s daily thoughts and actions during the last five months to prove to you his innocence of all the charges brought against him. Oh, I have felt sure he was innocent so long ; and to-night I have seen what are to me the proofs of it—thank Heaven ! ”

Her thanksgiving was so pure, so unconcealed, as she stood before him, with frightened face and clasped hands, that it rather allayed

than inflamed her husband's jealousy. After a few moments' pause, however, he broke out—

"You talk nonsense! That pocket-book was put into my hands by James Otway's best friend. It was in that character he first became acquainted with me."

"You mean Doctor Ledbury. How did you first meet him?"

"I don't see how that concerns you. However, it will prove to you he is what he professes to be—James Otway's friend, and quite incapable of any such purposeless meanness as you accuse him of. I was coming down here on Friday, when he got into the same carriage, and, without knowing who I was, he presently told me, when we had entered into conversation, that he was going to Waringham in search of a patient of his who had been suffering from *delirium tremens*, and who had escaped from his care; and he presently let out that it was the patient's attachment to a lady 'living thereabouts'—that was all the doctor would admit—which led him to search for him in that part of the world. I found out who the patient was by naming him unexpectedly. That led to my



inviting the doctor, telling him how I was connected with Otway by marriage, without mentioning any other connection with him you may be sure. Now are you satisfied?"

"Quite," responded Geraldine, whose eyes were glittering brightly with excitement. "I am quite satisfied that the 'doctor' knew who you were, made the first advances to you—who are reserved and never talk of your own accord to strangers—and that he has ever since been trying, in one subtle way or another, to prejudice your mind still further against James Otway, necessarily involving me in that attempt, until you have become so bitter against me that my only chance of getting your ear for a moment is by intruding upon you at night; and even now I can scarcely feel that I am safe from his influence," she added, with a shuddering glance round the room.

"What has put all this into your head?" asked Captain Morrison uneasily. "What motive could Doctor Ledbury possibly have for doing all this? Be reasonable. It is nonsense! What motive could he have?"

Geraldine's eyes were fixed upon the door.

"I don't know," she almost whispered. Then, suddenly coming close to her husband, she said, low in his ear—"That is what I came for to-night—to warn you that whatever revenge you may take now will satisfy, not your sense of justice, but some motive neither you nor I know of the man who is our guest. I don't know who he is or what he is; but I know something about him which I dare not tell you now—you would not believe me—but it is something which has made your fearful idea of revenge seem divinely right by comparison. Promise me to see me to my room to-night, for I dare not go alone."

As she still whispered, her voice grown a little louder, there was a knock at the door, and she fell to shuddering and shivering so that her husband had put her gently in a chair before he went to the door, unlocked and opened it. The late visitor was the soft-voiced doctor.

"I beg your pardon a thousand times for disturbing you so late, Captain Morrison. But I have just been called up to see the house-keeper; she is very ill indeed, and she begged me to go and ask if Mrs. Morrison would come

to see her—she has something important to say, she says. I am afraid the old lady is dying ; so perhaps, if Mrs. Morrison has not yet retired for the night, she would not mind.”

Geraldine came forward to the door with trembling steps.

“Will you come too, Philip ?” she asked, with imploring eyes which it was impossible to resist.

And they all three, the lady first, with the doctor speaking to her, Captain Morrison following, went along the corridor towards the staircase which led to the upper storey. Of course it did not occur to Captain Morrison to suspect that his guest knew that he and his wife did not share the same room ; but Geraldine was certain that he was not only aware of that fact, but that he had been listening at the door, and had chosen this means, not only of breaking off the dangerous *tête-à-tête*, but of gaining that interview with her which he was determined to have. Thanks to her husband's yielding to her appeal, she could baffle him yet, for she would not have dared a conversation with him alone to-night for a thousand worlds.

They came to the staircase, and the doctor had to drop behind her as they went up. When nearly at the top, she turned to make sure that her husband was following, and met the cold eyes of the doctor, who held his hand round the flickering candle as her twirling skirts raised a wind round the feeble light. She looked behind him with straining eyes and gasping breath—her husband was not there.

With a faint cry, she tried to rush down past the doctor, who very calmly barred the way.

"You have nothing to fear," said he coolly, "unless you make a disturbance. Your husband would not have gone back if you had been in any danger ; but in his presence Mrs. Symes would have been as mute as a mouse ; and she has something to say to you which it is very important that you should hear. Go on !"

He waved his hand imperiously in the direction of Mrs. Symes's room, which was only a few yards from the top of the staircase. Cold, dumb, and half-stupefied by fear, Geraldine moved her tottering feet in the direction he indicated.

## CHAPTER VII.

THE second storey of Waringham Hall was like the first, a labyrinth of awkward passages and draughty rooms. All the structural defects of the lower storey were of course accentuated in this less-important region, where indifference had combined with lack of skill to render the low-ceilinged rooms dark, ill-ventilated, and uncomfortable. The bedroom of the housekeeper, while by no means free from these defects, was, however, larger and more habitable than most of the rest ; and the fire which was now kept burning day and night gave it a look of cheerfulness which made a stronger impression upon a visitor than upon its permanent occupant, who lay awake hour after hour watching the flickering of red light and black shadow upon walls

and ceiling, listening to the crackling of the fire and to the weird music of the wind, every note of which, from the first faint wail which rustled the branches of the trees below to the hurricane which in mid-winter seemed to set the old house rocking, was heard with double clearness in this high corner-room.

On the night when Doctor Ledbury brought his hostess to the upper storey, Mrs. Symes was lying, as usual, with her hollow eyes staring up at the dancing reflections of the fire, when a slight sound, which was not the wind nor any of the faint night-noises of shrinking wood or scurrying mice to which she was accustomed, made her turn her head uneasily on her pillow. The one keen faculty she had, that of hearing, seemed to have grown more acute than ever in the general decay of her frame. The expression of alarm, which during the past seven months her withered features had borne with the rigidity of stone, deepened as the muscles of her face contracted, and she struggled to raise herself, calling to the kitchen-maid, who was snoring peacefully on a made-up bed in the corner of the room. It was not until she had been ad-

dressed for some time in vain that Martha, with ungracious grunts and groans, sat up, still half asleep, and grumbled out—

“What is it?”

“Get up and go to the door, and see if you can’t hear something,” croaked the old woman, whose frightened and consequently doubly hag-like aspect, as she supported herself on one elbow and pointed with a long, yellow, bony hand, drew an exclamation of terror from Martha, as she most unwillingly turned out of bed and shuffled towards the door.

“I don’t hear anything, Mrs. Symes. It’s only one of your fancies,” said the girl, who was not disposed to be respectful when called needlessly out of bed in the middle of the night. “If you like, I’ll open the door and put my head out.”

“No, no, no; don’t unlock it, don’t unlock it!” cried the old woman vehemently.

“Poke the fire, and speak out loud; let ’em hear your voice. It’s all right but when I’m alone,” she muttered; while the girl looked at her in some alarm, thinking her mind was wandering.

She took up the poker and obediently began to talk as she used it.

"If I was you, I'd see the doctor gentleman what's staying in the house. I've heard Mr. Johnson say he's offered to."

The old woman stopped her sharply.

"Hold your tongue! I won't see him, I won't see him! You don't know what you're talking about, Martha; and I tell you, if—— What's that?"

Martha heard nothing; but the old woman's sharper ears had caught the sound of a footstep outside; she started up in bed and repeated "What's that?" more shrilly, at the same moment that there was a soft tap at the door.

"It is I, Mrs. Symes," said Geraldine's voice.

"You, ma'am?" cried the housekeeper curiously, trying to delay Martha by a gesture as the girl hurried to the door.

Mrs. Morrison's voice seemed altered; but the change which had come over her beautiful features when the kitchen-maid had lit a candle and admitted her was more striking still. Terror as deep as that which had stamped



itself in the furrows of the old face that stared at her from the bed had drawn distorting lines on Geraldine's beauty; and the poor maid was so much alarmed in her turn by the sight of the two horror-struck faces, that, when her mistress gently whispered to her to put on her things and run to her own room, she obeyed with great relief at parting with such depressing company, tempered by an eerie predisposition to see hobgoblins in the passage.

"Did you send for me?" Mrs. Morrison asked, as soon as they were alone.

"No, ma'am."

"Has Doctor Ledbury been to see you?"

"Heaven help me! No-o, ma'am." And her teeth began to chatter and her head to shake, while Mrs. Morrison looked at her eagerly.

"Why do you answer me like that?" she whispered, leaning over the bed so that her words might travel no farther than the old woman's ears. "Are you afraid of him? What do you know about him?"

"I dursn't tell, ma'am, even to you. They said that, if I ever let it out——"

With a cry and a horrible rattling sound in her throat, she stiffened her gaunt form and fixed the gaze of her haggard, cavernous eyes on some object behind her mistress. Geraldine did not turn ; she knew what sight it was that had affected the housekeeper so deeply, and she quietly devoted her attention to calming her, taking one long, withered claw-like hand in hers, soothing her with assurances that she was quite safe, and listening meanwhile to the soft closing and locking of the door, and then to the approaching footsteps behind her. The old woman still stared, still muttered ; Geraldine suddenly turned and faced Doctor Ledbury, barring his nearer approach to the frightened invalid.

“ Now,” said she boldly, “ you have the chance you wanted. Say what you have to say.”

“ I have nothing to say, Mrs. Morrison,” he answered, with unexpected meekness, “ and I must apologize most humbly for having called you up in the middle of the night, and for having evidently given you a terrible fright into the bargain.”

He spoke in his usual soft, suave voice; and, if there was any expression at all in his cold eyes, it was one of amusement at her astonishment and at the housekeeper's terror rather than anything more threatening.

"I don't understand you, Doctor Ledbury. If this is a practical joke to show your power in this household, it is an act of bad taste so unheard of that it would be useless to waste indignation upon a man who could be guilty of it." Then, as she glanced again at the housekeeper, her tone changed to one more authoritative. "You see that your presence is causing this poor woman great distress. If you really have nothing to say, I must beg you to retire."

"One moment, if you please," said he as gently as before. "You have done me great injustice, Mrs. Morrison, since the very moment when I first had the honour of being introduced to you. The knowledge of this and a certain suggestion you made to me this evening which implied a terrible accusation, perhaps unconsciously to yourself, have made me very anxious to clear myself in your eyes. I am sorry that

I had no choice but to take means which have proved rather alarming to you."

"Then you have something to say to me?"

"It would be of no use. Your prejudice against me is formed, and you would not believe me."

"I must believe you. Why do you not speak? I know you are not Doctor Ledbury. Who are you?"

"If you should learn who I am, will you give me your word you will keep the secret until I release you by divulging it myself?"

She hesitated.

"I don't think I can bind myself to that."

"I only ask you to keep the secret for a month. The safety of the man you and I care most for in the world depends upon it."

"My husband's?" asked Geraldine, coldly.

"No, not your husband's, your—brother's," said he, with somewhat insulting emphasis.

"Sir James Otway's?"

"Yes, Sir James Otway's."

"Will you swear that his safety depends upon my keeping the secret?"

"I swear that Sir James Otway's safety

depends upon your keeping the secret you are about to learn."

Something in his hard earnestness as he pronounced these words inclined her, almost for the first time, to believe him.

"I promise," she began timidly.

"Swear!"

"I swear not to divulge your secret until you release me, unless a month passes without your doing so."

She heard a moan from the bed, and, turning, saw the housekeeper's sunken eyes fixed upon her piteously. Geraldine shuddered, but her word was given. The secret, true or false, she must hear at all risks; though, now that she had given the pledge, an unaccountable impulse made her wish to delay the offered announcement. She seemed to feel, by the satisfaction with which this man listened to her oath, that by this secret he would assume some fresh power over her; she put out her hand to stop him as he advanced towards her, and said, in a voice which she with difficulty kept steady—

"You will tell me—the truth?"

"I will tell you nothing ; as I said before, you would not believe me. You want to know who I am ; ask—her."

He pointed towards the bed, where the poor old housekeeper made a weak attempt to evade the part of the conversation allotted to her by closing her eyes, as if asleep, a subterfuge which the quivering muscles of her yellow, wrinkled face at once betrayed. Geraldine crept slowly up to the bedside, glancing from the one to the other of this strange pair of confederates without an inkling of the secret she was going to learn, but filled with anticipatory dread of it. At last she touched the left hand of the housekeeper, which was clutching the bed-clothes convulsively.

"Tell me, Mrs. Symes," she whispered, when Doctor Ledbury interrupted.

"Mrs. Symes," said he softly, "you had better tell Mrs. Morrison, first of all, when and where it was that you heard what you are going to tell her."

She opened her unwilling eyes and looked up at her mistress.

"When and where ? Yes, to be sure," she

croaked in her harsh and broken voice, in a wandering and uncertain manner. Then she seemed to collect her thoughts and quavered out—"Ah, dear me, dear me, yes, it was here in this house I heard it, eight months ago come Christmas, when my poor old master, Sir Charles, lay dying!"

Geraldine stopped her, starting up from the half-kneeling position by the bedside into which she had fallen in order to catch the broken words. He calmly signed to her to resume her place; but the old woman, thus interrupted, said nothing more aloud, but continued to mutter and murmur a mixture of prayer and narrative below her breath.

"Ask her who I am," said Doctor Ledbury, who had made his way noiselessly round to the other side of the bed, and was watching the withered face, whose eyes were again closed, attentively and somewhat apprehensively.

"Who—is—this—gentleman?" asked Geraldine, slowly.

Before an answer could escape from the old woman's lips, the subject of the question withdrew himself so closely to the wall at the head

of the bed as to be unseen by its occupant, while he lifted a warning hand towards the lady, as if to prepare her for a shock. Mrs. Symes shook her head, opened her eyes, and, on a repetition of the question, she quavered out slowly but distinctly to the attentive ears that listened just half a dozen words. And a strong man's hand laid sharply on her shoulder told her that was enough.

Geraldine had been prepared by Lindley Fielding's mystifying revelations, by months of suspense—of sorrow, by all the strange events since her discovery of James, by Doctor Ledbury's presence, by his threats, by his hints, and, lastly, by the warning he had just given her—to receive some communication astonishing and perhaps terrible. Yet, in spite of all this, the words were no sooner out of the housekeeper's mouth than she started up from her knees with a wild and shrill cry, which rang through the house and startled her two companions. Doctor Ledbury hurried to the door and unlocked it.

"I warned you ; I told you to be careful, to be on your guard," he cried impatiently.



"Compose yourself, for Heaven's sake, and have something to say in case anybody comes."

But Geraldine stood before him as heedless as a madwoman, staring at him incredulously, panting and struggling with herself.

"It is not true," she gasped hoarsely. But even as she spoke, with her eyes fixed upon him, she was convinced against her will; and, turning away, overcome with a torrent of feelings impossible to analyze, she sank on to a chair with dry eyes and a burning brain, while the old housekeeper watched her, still moaning, and the pseudo-doctor listened at the door.

"Your husband is coming," he said quickly. "Can you see him yet?"

"Yes, oh, yes!" she answered, rising unsteadily, but with obedient alacrity which reassured him as to the course she would pursue.

However, he stepped forward towards her and whispered—

"You will not forget that you have sworn?"

"No, I won't forget." But she seemed

confused, as if too bewildered to understand fully either his questions or her own answers.

“And what are you going to say to him?”

“Say to him?” she echoed stupidly, putting her head down to meet her hands. “I don’t know, I must think about it. And you—you have more to tell me, or——” And she glanced at Mrs. Symes.

“No,” answered he hastily; “she has told you all she knows. But you are evidently hysterical; that will be a reason for my seeing you again to-night; then I will tell you all you want to know—and all about James,” he had just time to whisper in a confidential tone, when Captain Morrison’s sharp tap was heard at the door. “Go!” said he, glancing at the door, and murmuring into her ear an explanation of the scream which had brought her husband upstairs.

Deceiving her husband in little things was now, unhappily, old practice with Geraldine; and she opened the door as if ashamed of herself, but with a smile.

“Was that you I heard screaming?” he asked anxiously. “What is the matter?”

"Nothing. Mrs. Symes frightened me, that is all; I thought she was going to die, she looks dreadfully ill."

The housekeeper's ghastly and weird appearance, as her master put his head in at the door and immediately withdrew it, fully bore out this explanation.

"It is not a good thing, though, to scream like that at the bedside of a dying old woman," he muttered. "You might have sent her off altogether. What did she want to say to you?"

"Oh, nothing very important, of course! I'll tell you all about it to-morrow."

"You look worn out."

"I am. Doctor Ledbury says he must prescribe for me," she added, turning towards the interior of the room.

"Mrs. Morrison is in a highly nervous state," said Doctor Ledbury, coming forward. "If she is not calmer before retiring to rest, I must ask you, Captain Morrison, to prevail upon her to take a sleeping-draught."

"No, no," she cried with sudden agitation, which supported well the statement that she was nervous. The truth was that her confi-

dence in the efficacy of the pseudo-doctor's drugs was only too strong.

Her husband looked at her with much anxiety. Doctor Ledbury continued in a measured tone, whose significance was strong to her only—

“I must beg you, Mrs. Morrison, to send your maid to me when you are ready to retire to rest ; and I shall then be able to decide whether you ought to take a sleeping-draught or no. You have worked yourself up into a state of agitation which, if not calmed down either by natural or artificial means, would be fever before morning.”

She submitted with docility which surprised her husband, and made him glance from the one to the other with ever-alert suspicion. But both were perfectly guarded, both seemed perfectly at ease. Captain Morrison, after allowing his wife to summon Martha to resume her place in the sick-room, during which quest she curiously enough insisted on his remaining with the doctor, led her downstairs to her own room, where Aurélie, tired of waiting, had fallen asleep in a chair.

"You seem to have got over your suspicion of the doctor," he observed, looking at her rather curiously as he stood at the door before bidding her good night.

As her back was turned to the light in the room, he could not see the red flush that overspread her pale, tired face at this speech.

"Yes, and I am ashamed of them," she answered, in a faltering voice. "I have made a sort of apology for my coldness, and he has forgiven me very magnanimously. I must now make an apology to you for the intrusion which offended you so much——"

"No, no; I was not offended," he interrupted hastily. "You took me rather by surprise, you know, and—and I wasn't in a very good temper perhaps. But—but come again, and I'll treat you better; I'd rather you should come to—to—to give it me hot than that you shouldn't come at all. Good night!"

"Good night!" she replied, giving him her hand.

"Well, aren't you going to offer to kiss me?" he asked impatiently.

"What—after the snub you gave me this evening about my cold cheek?"

"I'll warm it," said he; and he flung his arms about her and held her against his breast with such yearning tenderness that she felt guilty and conscience-stricken, and could not meet the passionate gaze of his eyes as he lifted her white face with one loving hand towards his. "Look here!" he whispered humbly, "I'll be on my guard against Ledbury; and, if there's anything wrong about him——"

"But there isn't," she exclaimed eagerly, starting up and laying her right hand emphatically on his shoulder. "Haven't I just told you I've had to confess my mistake and even apologize? You are not to take any notice of what I said—at least, please don't," she added, seeing that, after the manner of over-indulged women, she had become unduly peremptory.

"Very well," he agreed, not quite satisfied concerning the sudden change of feeling, but still docile. Then he drew her once more towards him, and said, in a low voice in her ear, "See how it ends—how it always ends when you make me ever so angry! It is I who give

way, who come suing to you for the forgiveness and kindness which you, who deceive me and don't care for me, ought to beg me for. I shall go back to my room to-night, thinking, while the first glow of the pleasure of having held you in my arms lasts, that I have come a step nearer to you and the love I want you to give me. And then I shall remember this"—and he tossed up her right hand which now hung quite limply down by her side—"and this"—and he put his hand over her calmly beating heart—"and the passive way in which your lips received the touch of mine. And I shall curse you for a statue and myself for an ass, and be no better off than I was before. And you will deceive me again, and I shall make you hate me again; and we shall have another of these paltry reconciliations which lead to nothing; and so on and on, I suppose, until the little brain my love has left me gives way, and you can shut me up for a lunatic and enjoy yourself."

He relaxed his hold upon her slightly, that he might look, half plaintively, half defiantly, into her face. But she did not remain limp and passive now; she sank down trembling on to

her knees at his feet, with the tears glistening in her eyes.

"Oh, Philip, I am sorry ! I am so wretched that I can't begin to love anybody yet ; but I will try as soon as I am ha—ha—happier !" she sobbed, in a whisper.

While he was yet raising her from the ground, the unmistakable measured footsteps of Doctor Ledbury were heard along the corridor, at the very end of which, having withdrawn themselves from the doorway of the room in which the maid awaited her mistress, husband and wife were standing. The words she was speaking froze on Geraldine's lips ; she started up, and, hastily bidding her husband good night, hurried into her room, while Captain Morrison went slowly back to his own. A few moments later Aurélie hastened to meet the doctor, and to tell him that madame was ready to receive monsieur.

Doctor Ledbury found Mrs. Morrison in her boudoir, a large, bright apartment which had once been the schoolroom. Aurélie remained with her mistress while the doctor felt the pulse of the latter, and asked her a few formal ques-



tions ; then he sent the maid downstairs to the library in search of a little case which he said she would find on the centre table.

As soon as she had left the room, Geraldine, who had been prepared with her question, said quickly—

“ If what you have told me is true, why do you hide yourself under a false name ? ”

“ For the sake of the only man I care for in the world—James Otway.”

She started.

“ You have shown your affection in a very singular manner.”

“ I have shown it by watching over him during the past three months, by twice saving his life during that time from attacks made through the meanest of channels—a bribed domestic—by the speed with which I hurried down here, knowing the dangers which surrounded him if he had strayed into the neighbourhood of the woman whom he loved and the man who hated him, and by that greatest proof which I have already given you.”

Geraldine sprang up in great agitation,

looked at him keenly, and moved restlessly about, not knowing what to think or to believe.

"You say his life was twice attacked. How? By whom?" she asked, at last.

"By poison, through a woman introduced as cook into the house where he was lodging."

"Introduced by whom?"

He hesitated. She repeated the question.

"By the only man I know of who wishes James harm."

"Therefore—Lindley Fielding?" said she, with trembling voice.

"Lindley Fielding forgot his grudge against James the moment he heard his life was in danger."

Geraldine remembered Lindley's evident anxiety about James when she saw him at Chiswick; and this confirmation of one part of Doctor Ledbury's statement alarmed her still more.

"Then whom do you mean?"

"You know," he whispered significantly.

"It is impossible!" she burst out. "Captain Morrison—my husband—is passionate and re-

vengeful ; but he is not a coward. He would not use such means."

"He will use any means to satisfy his passions ; he gives himself up to whichever attacks him, and is as violent and unreasonable in his hatred as he is in his love."

Doctor Ledbury glanced at her as if he thought this last suggestion a powerful one. But a vague feeling that her husband's wish to have his affection for her returned was not altogether so unreasonable as it had once appeared to her had crept into her heart during the passionate appeal he had made to her that night, so that no answering flash of indignation followed the doctor's words. He tried another tack.

"Well, you will be able to judge when he comes face to face with James Otway, as he is determined to do."

Geraldine's composure gave way, and she began to fidget and to tremble. He saw his advantage, and was on the point of following it up, when she stopped him as he was about to speak.

"You have told me enough, thank you. It

is not necessary to try to irritate me further against my husband in order to induce me to keep my oath. I shall do that in any case, and whatever your motive for secrecy may be."

"I have told you — my affection for James——"

"Ah, yes, I remember! So you did," she said, very slowly raising her eyes to his face with straightforward incredulity — "so you did!"

She pointed to the door to restrain a protest, for her ears had caught the sound of Aurélie's light footsteps, rendered even lighter than usual by a very natural wish to learn what sort of a *tête-à-tête* was going on between her mistress and the visitor for whom her dislike was an open secret. Her errand had been unsuccessful; so Doctor Ledbury went to his own room, found the case she had been sent to look for, and returned with a sleeping-draught, which Geraldine civilly declined to take. Then, after giving her some grave advice to compose herself and dismiss all anxiety from her mind, which sounded quaintly from the lips of one of the chief causes of

her distress, Doctor Ledbury retired, and Geraldine returned to her own room.

Aurélie at once locked the door with such ostentatious haste as had the desired effect of attracting her mistress's attention.

"What is the matter, Aurélie? What are you afraid of?"

"Rien, madame. Seulement, quand on sait qu'il y a des brigands dans le voisinage——"

"But that was two days ago, Aurélie. The poor thief is far enough away by this time," answered Geraldine, rather uneasy.

"Ah, madame, ils sont malins, les voleurs! Vous les croyez disparus à tout jamais; et puis tout d'un coup, v'là qu'ils reviennent et qu'on les voit rôder autour de la maison, tout en cherchant un trou quelconque par lequel——"

"Who has put these silly ideas into your head? You may be quite sure that the thief, when he is well enough to steal again, won't try at Waringham."

But there were symptoms of intelligence and of malice too under all the girl's affectation of terror, which made her mistress's real alarm difficult to hide.

"Cependant, madame," said the maid more seriously, "Davis, le jeune garde-chasse, l'a vu aujourd'hui près de la métairie; et quand je lui ai fait des reproches de ne pas l'avoir arrêté, il m'a dit——"

"Well, what?"

"Il m'a dit—que j'en savais déjà plus long que lui. Je lui ai répondu qu'il n'en était rien, et puis—et puis c'est tout, madame."

And, with that ultra-innocence that none but a Parisian woman can assume, Aurélie proceeded with her duties, leaving her mistress discreetly warned that the mysterious thief was still in the neighbourhood, and that the secret, if not of his identity, at least of her own interest in him, had transpired.

Next morning it was easy to see that whatever prescription Doctor Ledbury had made up for insuring his hostess's rest, had failed lamentably of its effect; her worn, wan face, heavy eyes, and nervous manner testified to the night of wearing, sleepless anxiety she had passed. Daylight seemed, as usual, to have cooled Captain Morrison's passion; and Geraldine, without daring to interfere, saw him

leave the breakfast-room with Doctor Ledbury, and presently watched them from the windows as they strolled through the park together. Their walk was, however, so leisurely that she had reason to hope that the rumour of James's having been again seen in the neighbourhood had failed to reach their ears ; and, as at last they sauntered out of sight, she turned quickly from the window, left the room, and ran up to the top of the house, bent on discovering what that piece of information was that Mrs. Symes had evidently been prevented by the doctor from adding to the one startling disclosure she had made. She knocked at the housekeeper's door, full of excitement, and, as the old voice quavered out "Come in !" she entered with the important question she wished to ask trembling on her lips.

She did not utter it ; for, sitting upright, stiff and Medusa-like by the side of the bed, was Miss Elizabeth, evidently on guard and in the service of the enemy. Geraldine, to whom this sight was confirmation of the truth of the disclosure which had been made to her, was struck with consternation and disappoint-

ment so evident as to call up to the elder lady's thin lips a very disagreeable smile. Her visit was not quite in vain, however, for it was clear that the mere sight of her face was a relief to the poor old housekeeper, in whom the common hatred of all the household to Miss Elizabeth had become the very strongest feeling save one of which her lymphatic nature was capable. As her young mistress bent over her, looking kindly into the faded eyes, she formed with her lips rather than uttered the words—"Don't trust him." And, with a responsive and reassuring pressure of the thin old hand, Mrs. Morrison, after inquiries as to her night's rest, left her under her grim guard.

It was not until after luncheon that Geraldine got the opportunity she wished for of speaking again to her husband alone; for it was evident that Doctor Ledbury had small trust in her promise to keep his secret. However, before they left the table, he expressed a wish to see how the housekeeper was, and went upstairs with Miss Elizabeth—another eloquent circumstance—and as Eleanor had of



late fallen into the habit of taking an hour's undisturbed rest in the afternoon on the sofa in the morning-room, Geraldine was able to lead her husband off to the drawing-room unmolested. Again the doctor had been at work between them, she felt sure ; and when she had led him in a coaxing manner to his favourite armchair, and had felt in his pockets with her own hand for his cigar-case, he raised his eyes to hers in his old defiant, mistrustful manner, and the expression in them distinctly asked—"What do you want to get out of me now?"

This eloquent gaze was so long and so steady that her fingers trembled and she asked falteringly—

"Why do you look at me so, if—if you meant all you said last night?"

"I would not look at you 'so' if I could believe you meant all that your actions imply now." But his manner was not hard, nor was his voice harsh ; and she slid down on her knees on to a footstool beside him.

"Look here !" said she. "Don't frighten me directly I try to please you, or I simply can't go on——"

But he interrupted her by laying his hand on her shoulder, while his dark, sensitive face showed the struggle within him.

“Your hatred was sincere—I knew what I had to deal with ; but this—I don’t understand yet, and—and—I must hold out, for I’m only too ready to yield to you.”

But he had yielded, his hand was trembling on her shoulder ; his plaintive eyes were drawn in spite of himself to the face which had such fascination for him. Her abhorrence of him had gradually weakened before his kindness, until his appeal on the preceding night had opened her eyes somewhat suddenly to the full extent — or what she considered the full extent — of her errors of conduct and judgment with regard to him ; and now that her horror of him had disappeared, she learnt at once how easy it was to turn his black looks into the gaze of passionate fondness which had formerly been even more repugnant to her. Her eyes fell before his ; but she did not shrink from the touch of his hand ; she put her own fingers lightly upon his, and bent a little towards him.

“Geraldine, why are you so kind ? What

do you want? What do you mean? You are not tricking me again, are you?"

"No, no, no; indeed I am not!" she assured him, meeting his look with eyes as full of passion as his own. I will never deceive you again—I should have done better to trust you at first—I am going to trust you now."

His face darkened suddenly with suspicion.

"Well?" said he shortly.

"Don't look so angry. Oh, if you knew how hard it is to speak! But I have no one to help me, no one to advise me; and I thought—after last night—I would make a bold stroke, and—and—put my head into the lion's mouth, and risk it, and—and—tell you, and trust to your generosity. But if you look like that, I may as well give it up, for it would certainly be of no use."

"Try me," said he, in a low voice, certainly not without apprehension as to what sort of confession his not very tractable wife might have to make.

"James Otway is in the neighbourhood still."

He snatched his hand from her shoulder,

but controlled himself by a strong effort as she shrank back, and asked hoarsely—

“When did you see him—and where?”

“I have not seen him, I swear it. I learnt that he was about here from one of the servants. I resolved to tell you, and to throw myself on the mercy you offered me.”

“Yourself.”

“Yes. For my sake, I implore you not only to give up your revenge, but to find him out and to save him; for I believe he has much more dangerous enemies than you. Lindley Fielding hates him,” she added hastily, meeting his penetrating look; “and you have heard how unscrupulous this Cousin Lindley is.”

“And you have the audacity to ask me to do this? Me, your husband, who have been vainly humiliating myself to beg for the affection you lavish upon this worthless, selfish scamp, who betrayed my sister, and put your own reputation in danger. It is unheard of—preposterous!”

He would have risen in his indignation, but she clung to him and would not let him go.

“Should I dare to be so bold, if there was

anything to be ashamed of in my liking for him ? ”

“ Very likely. Women can do anything in the cause of a bad man.”

“ Oh, Philip, he is not a bad man ! I don’t believe it was he who—— ”

Suddenly she stopped short, the colour excitement had called up faded from her face, her form grew rigid, her very breathing seemed to be arrested ; and all without one word from him to bring about this transformation. His first impulse was to throw his arms round her, alarmed, thinking she was ill ; but the next moment he saw that the change in her was the result of some disquieting thought, and he sprang up, shaking himself free from her, and began marching down the room. Paralyzed by the idea which had entered her mind, she had sunk down upon the footstool, and she did not attempt to interrupt the angry words he muttered as he strolled away.

“ A wretched, skulking, sneaking fellow, who will hang about a house, ready to crawl in and whine at the feet of a foolish woman whenever he may get an opportunity while the hus-

band is away ! Does that look like innocence ? Is that the action of an honest man ? ” he cried, wheeling round suddenly where he stood at the other end of the room, and addressing his wife in a voice shaking with passion. She did not answer ; indeed she could not answer this ; and, bursting into tears, she laid her head upon the nearest chair and sobbed.

In the agitation of this interview neither husband nor wife had heard the ring of the entrance-bell, or footsteps in the hall. But at this moment both were startled by the opening of the door ; and the butler, seeing only his master, who stood opposite to the door, since the partition between the two drawing-rooms hid his mistress from sight, announced, in a voice he could scarcely keep steady—

“ Sir James Otway ! ”

Captain Morrison made a step back, as if he had been struck. Geraldine, her head going round, her hands trembling so much that they would scarcely serve her, staggered to her feet, and, after a moment's hesitation, advanced timidly to meet him.

## CHAPTER VIII.

As James walked the length of the room towards her, Geraldine was struck, in spite of the agitation from which she was suffering, by the great change which less than three days had made in him. He was still pale, he had not yet recovered the firm, easy tread of a young man in perfect health; but he was self-possessed and unconstrained, and he approached her with an unreserved warmth and eagerness which gave strong support to the pleadings she had just urged to her husband on his behalf.

"You didn't expect to see me back so soon, did you?" he asked, as he shook hands with her.

"No; I am very, very glad to see you. I must introduce you to my husband. I—I don't think you have met him before."

"No, I have not had that pleasure," replied James, quite easily, turning as Captain Morrison came slowly from the end of the room.

"Philip, you have heard a great deal about the bold bandit of seven years old who kidnapped me and brought me to Waringham. Let me introduce you to my adopted brother, Sir James Otway."

"I am very happy to make Sir James Otway's acquaintance," said Captain Morrison, stiffly, without noticing the hand James instinctively held out to Deldee's husband.

"Ill-tempered, jealous little beggar!" thought James; and his face almost expressed this comment as he turned towards Geraldine.

"Do you know what I have done to inspire poor old Johnson with so much horror, Deldee?" asked he, as he sat down. "If I had been the ghost of Guy Fawkes in sticking-plaster boots, with an extra box or two of matches, he couldn't have opened his eyes wider when he saw me, or been more astonished when I expressed my intention of coming in."

She laughed uneasily.



"He is getting old, you know," she began, and stopped.

"Perhaps, after Thursday night, he begins to think the back-door or a kitchen window the proper entrance for me," continued James, turning towards his sulky and silent host, who stood with ramrod stiffness by the table, as if unwilling to be drawn into the conversation. "I certainly did not make a very dignified first appearance here during your occupation of the Hall, Captain Morrison. But you must have learnt all the circumstances ; and I am sure you understand that, if I had been in my right senses, I should have presented myself in a more orthodox manner. I have lost no time in coming to apologize for the disturbance I caused, owing to Johnson's insisting on passing me off as a burglar."

"Perhaps your mysterious manner of leaving the house influenced him, Sir James, even more than your coming. You were in your right senses then, I believe ?"

"I am not sure that I was," said James, gravely, while his face flushed at the dry, arrogant tone in which the question was asked.

"Of course you have a right to be surprised at my conduct, which was nothing less than insane. I can only explain it by assuring you that I have been ill lately, and have suffered with my head, and that yesterday was the first day for three months on which my thoughts have been perfectly clear."

Geraldine started; an exclamation burst from her lips, but, as both gentlemen turned towards her, she recovered herself, and said nothing.

"I am delighted to hear of your recovery," said Captain Morrison, in the same tone as before.

James again grew red, and said quietly—

"If you knew me better, Captain Morrison, I hope you would not doubt my word. It is a painful enough position to have to apologize when sane for actions committed when I was not responsible for them. Perhaps you have a right to doubt the word of a man in such a position—I don't know. But I can send you a medical certificate in support of my words as soon as I get back to town."

"Whose? James, where are you going?"

burst out Geraldine, unable to control herself.

"To the doctor whose care I have been under," said he, his voice growing gentle as soon as he spoke to her. "He is a cousin and namesake of the celebrated physician Doctor Ledbury, and he attended my uncle on his death-bed."

"There is no need for you to go to town for support of your words, Sir James," said Captain Morrison, as drily as ever. Then he paused for a moment, to give full effect to the following words—"Your friend Doctor Ledbury is in this house."

"Here!" cried James, half-starting from his seat with unmistakable pleasure. "Then you will not long be in doubt about the truth of what I have told you."

"I am not in doubt now, I assure you. Your friend Doctor Ledbury has satisfied me on many points."

James looked puzzled as well as angry. Geraldine sat forward on her chair, putting her own construction on each word that fell from either, and so much excited by the hopes

and fears they roused in her that, as at that moment the door was heard to open, she glanced up with no other feeling than annoyance at the interruption. But when she saw that the intruder was Doctor Ledbury, and noted the effect the unexpected sight of James had upon him, her annoyance was swallowed up in the intensity of her interest, and involuntarily she rose to her feet at the moment that James sprang up to meet his friend, while the doctor's stolid, fresh-coloured face grew suddenly livid, and he stopped short, with a sort of extinction of all expression which Geraldine interpreted as the result of consternation. Then she glanced at her husband; but the look of savage sullenness which his face had worn since James's entrance had not changed, and she could only conclude that the true significance of the meeting had escaped him. For, after the first shock of surprise, Doctor Ledbury came forward with eagerness, feigned well enough to deceive James, in whose greeting Geraldine fancied she could detect anxiety to be reassured as to the loyalty of the friend against whom she had conceived such preposterous suspicions.

"How did you come here?" asked James, after the first greetings.

"I came in search of you. Where have you been hiding for the last two days?"

"I have been staying at a farmhouse near here. You remember old Corbyn and his wife, Deldee?"

"And are you staying there?" she asked quickly. "Why didn't you let us know?"

"Mr. Crosse wanted me to keep quiet for a day or two." Doctor Ledbury turned sharply in spite of himself at these words. "The old gentleman has been awfully good to me, and has been with me constantly, asking me all sorts of questions, until I think he must have materials for my biography. But he has been so kind that I couldn't make any objection, so by his orders I have been a close prisoner, subject to strict interrogatories, until to-day."

Doctor Ledbury laughed uneasily; and, as James rose to take leave, he started up quickly at the same time.

"I must walk back with you and see what sort of diggings you have," said he, "and hear

all about the mysterious manner in which you landed at Waringham."

But at the moment that he was following James to the door, Captain Morrison stopped him to say in a low voice—

"I have to go to town by the 4.30 train, Doctor Ledbury. I hope you will excuse my absence for a few hours. I shall be back as early as I can to-morrow." His tone was so very grave that it was evident that the business which called him away was urgent; his manner affected the doctor, who answered hastily—

"Then I am afraid I shall not have the pleasure of seeing you again. For, now that my truant patient has turned up, I must get back to town myself as fast as I can."

"Well, do just as you please. The house is at your disposal, and the ladies will do their best to entertain you as long as you care to remain. But I still hope to find you here on my return."

The words were courteous enough; but perhaps it was his still hot indignation against Sir James Otway which caused Captain Morrison to speak with less cordiality than he had yet

shown towards his guest. As soon as Doctor Ledbury and his patient had left the house together, the former linking his arm through that of the latter in the most affectionate manner, Captain Morrison returned to the drawing-room, where he had left his wife. She started at his entrance, and turned towards him a face pale and quivering with the excitement of the past quarter of an hour; she looked at him pleadingly, but did not speak. He was as grave as ever; but there was nothing menacing to her in his sternness, and she left the window where she had been standing, and came, with rather hesitating steps, towards him.

“Well,” said he, not ungently.

“You are going away, Philip?”

“Yes, I am going away.”

“Why—why? Where are you going?”

“Let me ask you a question first. Do you believe now that Sir James Otway—this man you call your brother—is not the man who betrayed my sister?”

“Oh, yes, I am sure of it! Do you think he would have dared to come here to-day to face you, if——”

"Then you really believe that to arrive at the truth would be to arrive at proof of his innocence?" said he, interrupting her passionate question.

"Yes."

"Of course you would be delighted then to help me to discover the whole truth?"

"Yes," said she, with surprise and some hesitation.

"Then give me my sister's address. You have it, I know."

The quiet peremptoriness of this command cowed Geraldine. But, instead of accepting the challenge with delight, she trembled, and her eyes fell, and she stood before him mute and inert as if the order had been a death-warrant.

"Well, is your faith in your brother no stronger than that?"

"He is innocent, I am sure of it!" she faltered, in a stifled voice.

"You don't seem very eager to have it proved."

Without answering, she sat down and burst into tears. The next moment her husband's hand was caressing her, and his voice, hoarse



and rather unsteady, spoke close to her ear—

“Don’t cry, child. You know I won’t do anything to wound you. Haven’t you any faith in me yet?”

“Then don’t ask me for the address; I—I can’t give it you.”

“But I must have it, my darling. You must give it me and trust me. If I have suspected your brother wrongfully, I promise to spare no pains to try to clear him of the other charge, of which you say he is innocent. Can I do more than this?”

“Oh, Philip, don’t ask me for it! You don’t know what you are making me suffer.”

His arm trembled as it rested upon her shoulders; but he repeated, in a low voice—

“I must have the address.”

Then there was a silence for a few minutes, during which she hung her head and cried, and he stood over her quietly waiting. At last she raised her head and, saying brokenly—

“She lives at Enfield. That is all I know,” she shook herself free from his arm, sprang up, and fled away to her own room.

When she came down to dinner, her husband had left the house.

There was an uncomfortable feeling of constraint over the party at the Hall that evening, each member of it putting a different meaning upon the mysterious errand which had called the master of the house away so abruptly. Geraldine tried very hard to seem at ease, and during dinner she succeeded in infusing some sort of animation into the rest. But when, later, they were all in the drawing-room, and Doctor Ledbury was engaged in conversation with Miss Elizabeth, she grew restless and almost hysterical, and could scarcely keep the tears from her eyes. Borrowing one of Miss Eleanor's shawls, therefore, she opened one of the French windows of the smaller drawing-room, and went out, saying that she must go and see how some new orchids were getting on which had arrived that day. She glanced at Doctor Ledbury as she went out, with an intimation that he might follow her as soon as he pleased. She had something important to say to him; and, when she reached the conservatory where, among the blended beauties and sweet scents of her favourite

flowers, she soon recovered more serenity, she threw herself into an American chair in the carpeted corner under the soft light of the Chinese lanterns, and glanced anxiously through the steaming panes for the dark figure she dreaded, yet perforce was eager to see.

In a few minutes she was satisfied; for against a space of the night-sky between the trees of the park she saw what looked like a slowly moving shadow making its way towards the end of the conservatory, and she waited with fast-beating heart for the doctor's entrance. But the minutes passed on, the shadow had disappeared, and still Doctor Ledbury did not come in; she rose, went quickly towards the door, and, as she did so, the dark shadow which was all she could distinguish through the steaming glass moved away from the end of the conservatory in the direction of the corner of the house.

"Why doesn't he come in? What can he be afraid of?" thought she; and, with an impatient hand already upon the door-handle, she was on the point of calling to him, when a suspicion that it might be her husband or

some one set to watch her on his behalf arrested her for a moment and spurred her the next instant to run out into the garden after the retreating man. But as soon as there was no damp glass between them to give indistinctness to the outline of his figure she was reassured, and, following him quickly as he still retreated before her, she called softly—

“ Doctor Ledbury, Doctor Ledbury, I want to speak to you—I must speak to you ! ”

Still he paid no attention to her, and seemed bent upon escaping into the trees which grew thickly up to the borders of the garden on the east side of the house.

“ Doctor, you are in danger ; my husband suspects you ! ” she hissed out ; and at these words the escaping figure stopped short and slowly turned.

Her object gained, Geraldine stopped also, and sank for a moment, panting more from emotion than fatigue, upon a garden-seat. As she heard his footsteps returning to her side, she said in a whisper—

“ Why did you give me this chase ? Come back to the conservatory. Do you want to

set all the servants talking?"—and, rising without turning to look at him, she led the way back. But she heard no footsteps following her, and, turning impatiently, she saw that he was standing still by the seat.

"Why don't you come?" she asked feverishly; then, as he did not answer, she came back with her eyes fixed apprehensively upon him in the gloom, until she was almost near enough to have touched him, when she suddenly staggered back, with a sharply drawn breath, whispering "James!"

As the words left her lips she felt his arm supporting her, and trembled at his touch with a thrill of excitement she did not understand.

"James," she repeated—"James, I did not know you—I took you for Doctor Ledbury—your figure in the dark looked so like him. It is you, isn't it?" she continued, as he still did not speak.

And looking up, she saw that his face was not the gentle, kind face of the brother and playfellow she had tyrannized over, nor did it bear the dull, dazed expression which had

seemed so pitiful to her when she saw him at Chiswick, and while he was confined to the room in the west wing; but he looked like a man roused suddenly out of a deep sleep to find himself standing on the brink of an abyss. She uttered a faint cry, like a sob, and tried to free herself from him; but he would not let her go. He looked down at her without losing the strange expression of fear, bewilderment, and resolution which seemed stamped upon his features, and said, in the deep voice which always grew sweet when it addressed her—

“Don’t be afraid of me, Deldee. I must speak to you, child; I must know what you meant by those words you intended for the doctor.”

But, for answer, she made another effort to get away from him; and, feeling that the hand with which she tried to remove his from her arm was icily cold, he led her back to the conservatory and stepped inside with her.

“Now, Deldee, tell me what you meant,” said he, letting her arm go and looking down at her steadily.

She put her hands up to her head and remained silent for a moment, with her eyes on the ground and a look of hopeless bewilderment and uncertainty on her face. He came nearer to her, and put out one hand as if to touch her shoulder ; but he drew it back again and only whispered, bending his head to see her face—

“ Tell me, Deldee.”

She drew herself up and returned the gaze of his inquiring eyes with a look so imploring, so full of fiery despair, that his resolution melted as he met it, and her first words were uttered as he was springing forward to comfort her. She shrank back, frightened, and stopped him by a gesture as she spoke—

“ Don’t ask me—don’t ask me ! I am so puzzled and bewildered and miserable that I don’t know what I say or why I say it. I am hedged in by horrible fears, and I speak without thinking just what they dictate to me. I have been teased and tortured and put on the rack to answer questions and to evade them, until I seem to have no sense left to understand what I say. I have had to answer,

with my will or against it, at my husband's command. Must I suffer the same torture at yours ?”

“No, no, Heaven forgive me, Deldee ; I would rather lose my right hand than cause you a moment's pain !” said he, not daring to advance or even to look at her, but speaking in a low voice, every note of which thrilled her as she listened to him.

Then neither spoke for a few moments. He remained standing on the same spot, as if under some spell too strong for him to break, while she tried to regain her composure and to decide what she might safely tell him of a secret which was growing too heavy for her to bear alone. She turned to the flowers and touched the blossoms near her with fingers which felt nothing, and bent over them mechanically, with no sense of their fragrance. Under the excitement of James's presence, thought came quickly, but, when she turned suddenly towards him, she met his eyes fastened upon her with a burning light in them, which instantly recalled to her mind the wild words of fondness which he had



written about her in the pocket-book put into her husband's hands by Doctor Ledbury. The words she had upon her lips were forgotten, her own gaze fell, and, without a sound, she turned towards the dining-room door, trying to recover her serenity that she might dismiss him calmly.

She had not gone three steps before he came to her side, and holding out his hand, said gently, without that passionate tremor in his voice which destroyed her self-possession—

"You will forgive me for disturbing you, Deldee. It wasn't quite my fault, you know, was it? You will say good night, won't you?"

"Good night," she faltered, giving him her hand with a timidity and constraint which she could not conquer and without looking up.

He retained her fingers in his grasp for a few seconds, and then said softly—

"Don't send me away like this, as if you were angry with me. I've done nothing to deserve it this time. I did not want to speak to you to-night; it was you who insisted on stopping me, wasn't it? Look up at me and say frankly, 'Good night, James!' I haven't

so many friends that I can afford to think I have offended one—and especially my—my good fairy!”

His voice shook a little on the last words ; but when she obediently raised her eyes the fiery gaze she could not meet was gone. It was a kind, friendly face that was bent towards her and reassured her ; but with her self-possession came back the remembrance that she had a warning to give him, and she repeated his last words earnestly.

“Your good fairy ! Yes, your good fairy has something to tell you—something so terrible that she does not know how to tell it. James, you are innocent, are you not ?” she burst out suddenly in a very low voice, but with the earnestness of a vital question.

He started with a look of pain and reproach which made her impulsively place her hands caressingly on his arm.

“I don’t mean of the murder,” she whispered quickly, “but of—of—any other very wicked thing.”

“I—I hope so,” said he, rather confused. “What do you mean ?”

She hesitated, and then said in a whisper—

“My husband suspects you—thinks you have—— Oh, James, you would never run away with another man’s wife, would you?”

But the question disconcerted him. He drew himself up and began to play with his moustache without at once answering; his evident agitation shocked and alarmed her, and, after waiting for him to speak, she caught his hand and said piteously—

“James, James, why don’t you answer? It can’t be true—I won’t believe it is true. I did doubt you once—I couldn’t help it—everything seemed so clearly against you; but you would never have come here and faced my husband as you did to-day if you had done the wrong he thinks, I am sure of it. Why don’t you speak out and tell me my trust is well-founded? Oh, James, you don’t know how dear your honour is to me!”

Her fingers were twitching and trembling round his, as her voice grew more plaintive, more earnest, in proportion to his increasing reluctance to look at and answer her. As the last words fell from her lips, he tried to snatch

his fingers from her clasp ; but she clung imploringly to him and whispered—

“No, no ; you know I will forgive you anything—only tell me, tell me ! I must know the truth ; I have been in suspense so long.”

Then he turned towards her at last ; but it was with an expression which made her shrink involuntarily back, and try to withdraw the hand which he now, in his turn, held fast. The passion with which she had pleaded to him to confess to her seemed but a feeble little gust beside the storm which shook his strong frame and flashed from his eyes and cowed her into timid silence as she listened.

“Why do you ask me, when you know what my answer must be ? I cannot tell you a lie—I have tried to avoid telling you the truth—you ought to shrink from it too. You are too severe—you treat a temptation conquered as gravely as you would a temptation yielded to ; if you were merciful—if you were wise, you would ignore it altogether. I cannot understand you to-night.”

“Then you didn’t run away with her, James ?”

"With her? With whom?"

"Captain Morrison thinks you wanted to run away with his—his——"

"His wife? Well, so I did, if you will force me to confession."

"Wife! James, James, what are you saying? Mrs. Farquhar is his sister, not his wife. I am his wife——"

"Yes; and you are the only woman whose unhappiness could move me as yours did to-day. I could see another woman beaten—kicked, with more composure than I felt to-day when that sulky brute frowned at you. And then, when I heard how you hate him, and what a wretched life you lead through his ill-temper and miserable jealousy, I couldn't contain myself—I lost my head, and the mad thought came to me that it would be better for you to—to go anywhere with—some one who worshipped you than stay here to be crushed under the tyranny of a man you despise. Don't turn away from me like that; you have no right to reproach me, since you forced me to tell you this. The very first glance at you through this glass, when I rushed

here to-night, hungry for a sight of you, made me unspeakably ashamed of myself. I could not see you clearly ; but in your white dress, with your head drooping among the flowers, you looked to me like an angel grieving for the sins of those around you which could make you suffer, but could not soil you ; and I slunk away when you opened the door, lest you should read the evil of my thoughts in my eyes and shrink away in pain from me."

There was a touch of the feverish exaltation which had marked his late illness in the young man's face and voice as he confessed his morbid fancy, and his eyes glittered from his pale, thin face with something of the fanatical devotion with which he had watched her when she came into the room into which he had been put in the west wing, on the night when he arrived at the Hall.

"Don't be afraid of me, don't be afraid of me," said he gently. "You know very well you need not be. You can send me away just when you like, and I will go at the first word. I have got back my senses now, and I will submit to you just as I used in the old days on the sands at Lowestoft."

But she had only turned away from him to dry her eyes ; and she took his hand like a child, and led him to a seat and sat down beside him, quite calm now, though her eyes were red and her face was very sad.

"I am no more afraid of you, James, than I used to be then," she said, trying to infuse her own grave self-possession into the still violently excited young man, who stared at her as if, in spite of his assurances, he was not yet quite master of his reason. "I am not shocked ; I don't shrink from you. I didn't know what you were going to tell me, or I should never have given you the pain of making you speak ; but I know now—I know now that you are just the good, kind old brother of the old days, and that it is not through your own fault that you have been unfortunate. Thank Heaven !"

"Go on, go on, Deldee ; tell me what you mean."

"I—I can't—I daren't—I don't know what to do !" she cried quickly, her calmness giving way again. "The more I learn of the mystery which hangs about this place and about you,

the more afraid I get to know the meaning of it."

"Tell me what you do know."

"I must not yet. Don't ask me, James. I know just enough to make the very fact of living torture to me, to make solitude hideous; and to make me dread my own dreams—that is what I know. But what to-night for the first time I begin to guess is so much more dreadful still, that the very thought of having to bear the secret alone—as I must bear it—seems to stop my breath and to make me feel quite calm and cold, as if I were already dead."

She spoke quietly, in a monotonous voice that had lost all ring. James, brought to himself by the intensity of the misery that seemed to be crushing the very life out of her, took her cold, nerveless hands in his own warm clasp and bent towards her anxiously.

"Why do you talk of bearing it alone, child? You can trust me—you have just said so."

"I know that, and what I may tell you I will. You are in danger, James, from the man you trust most in the world."



He let her hands fall, and rose hastily in great agitation, the cause of which she at first mistook.

“Now you are angry with me!” said she, with a plaintive sound of restrained misery in her voice. “And yet you ought to be able to see your danger by this time without my warning. It is foolish, it is mad of you to shut your eyes any longer. Are you quite satisfied with the life you have led since you left Waringham on the night after my dear guardian, your uncle, died? Doesn’t it ever occur to you now that the measures you took for clearing your character were not the right ones, and to ask yourself how you came to be so ill-advised about them? Don’t you ever wonder, now that you are staying by yourself at Corbyn’s farm, at the strange cloud which seems to have hung over your mind during the last few months, and look about for the cause—for the influence——”

She stopped short at the moment that he turned quite white, with haggard, staring eyes, and drawing his breath sharply, as if a wound had been rudely touched.

“You see I do,” he groaned hoarsely. “I

think and doubt and worry myself till the little sense I have left seems to be going. Why do you torment me by these hints? You must tell me all you know—you must; for, if your suspicions are right, there must be something worse, something terrible behind.”

His last words were so vehement that they frightened Geraldine, and for a moment she dared not answer him, but dropped her gaze from his passionate, fierce face to the carpet at her feet. Then he came back to her and knelt down by the seat in which she was still sitting, and meekly bowed his head until his lips touched her left hand, which was on the arm of her chair. Her fingers quivered, he heard a sob, and tears began to fall from her eyes on to his curly hair.

“Don’t cry, my darling, don’t cry. Never mind the wretched mystery—I don’t want to hear anything that hurts you to tell. My poor Deldee, my dear little fairy!”

He was growing rather incoherent as he leaned towards her and whispered his consolation in the tenderest and lowest of tones, with lips that came nearer and nearer to her ear, until

his hair touched hers. She started away from him with one swift look, eloquent of fear and reproach, which checked the outburst which was trembling upon his lips.

"Go, James ; you must go now," she urged, trying to steady her voice. "Don't look like that—I am not offended with you, my poor brother ; but—I have warned you, and—and you had better go now. Shake hands and—and say, say good night—and don't forget what I have said—suggested."

She got up quickly and held out a shaking hand to him.

"Good night, Deldee, good night. I——"

He released her hand, almost flung it from him, and walked abruptly towards the outer door of the conservatory without another look at her. But his fingers had hardly touched the handle when he stopped at the hoarse cry of "James!"

She checked herself as she was running towards him, and, holding the bars of a trellis over which a passion-flower grew for support, she asked, in a voice so weak that it scarcely reached him as he stood still by the door—

"What are you going to do? Where are you going?"

"Heaven knows!"

"Don't speak like that—don't pretend to be hard—it will kill me. What does he want you to do?"

"Doctor Ledbury?"

She made a motion of assent.

"He wants me to go up to town with him to-morrow morning."

"Promise to stay at Waringham until my husband returns."

"Your husband!"

"Yes. You don't understand him; I have only just begun myself to know that I have misunderstood him. If he has done you wrong by his suspicions—as I am sure he has—he has promised to atone for it, and he will keep his word. Wait till he comes back. Promise!"

"Are you sure he is not deceiving you, Del-dee? He is jealous and revengeful, and always on the look-out to entrap you in some way."

"Who told you that?"

He hesitated, somewhat taken aback. She continued, with fire—

"Ledbury—it was Ledbury, I know! Are you not yet cured of believing him? He is still trying to keep you apart from those who would serve you. When will you be warned?"

"But, Deldee, it was he who advised me to come and see you to-night; that was right, wasn't it?"

But she started back as he returned towards her, and a horrible fear shone in her eyes.

"No, no!" she cried passionately. "To send you here after poisoning your mind against my husband—after persuading you to think it would be best for you to—for me to—leave him! It was devil's work! Oh, James, don't you see? Can't you understand?"

She was so violently excited that the hands with which she staved off his nearer approach shook and twitched most piteously, while she glanced up at him with the helpless, wild look of a hunted animal. But there was no need for her to repulse him; as the sense of her words grew upon him, he became rigid with horror, and it was not until she touched his arm impatiently that his face relaxed, and he

put his hand slowly up to his head and looked at her.

"Deldee, it is impossible! Why should he do it?"

"He is a bad man!" she answered, trembling, and growing confused.

"Why, what do you know? He never told you that he had ever——"

"Ever what?"

"Been in prison."

"He has been in prison! When?" she asked eagerly.

"Years ago, when he was a young man. I guessed it by his walk, when I first saw him, and he confessed it to me without my asking him."

"What made him tell you?"

"I don't know. Now I think, perhaps he saw I suspected it; then I thought it a proof of generosity for him to place such a secret in the keeping of a stranger. Deldee, I—I must get out into the air; the place seems swimming round me."

He burst open the door of the conservatory, and leaned against the doorway; Geraldine

came slowly out and was turning to speak to him, when some object seen dimly through the mists of the evening drew her attention away, and she remained silent, with a look of suspicion and terror upon her face. James's eyes followed hers, and he was springing forward to cross the grass which stretched between him and the motionless figure that only watchful eyes could distinguish in the heavy shadow of the trees, when her hand on his arm arrested him.

"No, no ; you must not touch him. You have promised to submit to me ; now keep your word."

She was in such terrible earnest, her low whisper was so passionate, the clasp of her fingers so convulsive, that James stopped at once and looked down at her in astonishment.

"Why ? Why do you want to hold me back ? Your suspicions of him are stronger than mine. You have warned me against him yourself."

"Yes, yes ; but I want you to avoid him. You know he is dangerous—at least—at least

you seem to suspect that he is, and you yourself confess that you are puzzled about him. Then wait and watch, and try to be sure what his intentions are towards you before you rush hastily up to accuse him. That is only reasonable, isn't it? For even I, you see, am not sure that my suspicions may not all be wrong. So you will wait—wait until my husband comes back, won't you? Promise."

There was nothing else to be done to calm the pitiable state of nervous excitement into which she had worked herself; so, very reluctantly, James gave the promise; and then she shook his hand, rather abruptly wished him good night, and turned back into the conservatory. She was able to control herself until James, after lingering for one more long gaze at the shining hair and soft white gown which were all he could see of his good fairy as she retreated slowly from the door, turned and went straight back towards Corbyn's farm. Without turning her head, without hearing a sound, Geraldine knew the exact moment when the gaze of his loving, longing eyes was withdrawn, and, with a low moan of utter misery,



she flung herself into her favourite chair, and, twisting and writhing in her agony like a wounded animal, she burst into a passion of tears, the violence of which made her dead to every sense but that of her grief.

With a shriek she started up when some one touched her, and, stunned by the vehemence of her own tears and sobs, she could at first scarcely see, as she staggered back against the trellised wall, who the soft-footed intruder was. She had instinctively fancied it must be her husband, and the smile which she always forced to her lips on his appearance was already quivering on her tear-stained face before her dimmed eyes discovered that it was Doctor Ledbury who stood before her. In his part of Mephistopheles he appeared to her so hideous, so terrible, that, as if he had been not a human being and a guest, but a supernatural apparition, she rushed into the house without a word, covering her face with her hands. When, after some time spent in her own room in trying to recover an unruffled appearance, she again met the doctor in the drawing-room, he had just received a telegram,

which he was showing to the old ladies, summoning him, in the name of a well-known baronet whom he declared to be a patient of his, back to town. It was too late to catch the last train that night ; but Doctor Ledbury took his farewell of the ladies, as he would have to start long before their appearance on the following morning. He was most profuse in his thanks to Geraldine for her hospitality, and gave no sign of the understanding between them ; but she detected a stealthy look from eye to eye when he shook hands with Miss Elizabeth, and a most unusual look of fear on the lady's cold, hard face. It was not until the gray light of the morning, when she heard Doctor Ledbury's footsteps going downstairs softly, for fear of disturbing the ladies' sleep, and soon afterwards the sound of the carriage as it drove away through the park, that Geraldine, with a sigh of relief at his departure, which was tempered by apprehension as to the business which took him away, fell asleep.

As she was entering the breakfast-room next morning, the butler gave her a letter

directed in a scrawling, pointed woman's hand, writing to "H. Hammond Esq."; and as she was fortunately the first to enter the room, she made no scruple about opening it. It was, as she expected, the answer to her letter to Mrs. Fielding, and was written hurriedly and incoherently.

"DEAR MR. HAMMOND,

"Your letter has frightened me dreadfully, and upset me so that I really don't know what to do! Don't you know that Lindley has married me, and what do you want with him? He saw your letter, and he is very angry and disturbed, and he says you have nothing against him now, and you know it, and he has never done anything to hurt you, and he has no connection at all with all the dreadful things you write about. I think it is very unkind of you, as he knows nothing at all about it, and he is at all times ready to answer for himself—he says so. I don't know what you want to rake up things and tell them to other people for—and nor does he. I hope you will soon be well. I am sure my husband does not wish

you any harm—nor I don't either—but will be delighted to hear you are quite recovered.

“Yours truly,

“ADA FIELDING.

“P.S.—Lindley has just gone out. I don't know what's the matter with him; but he is dreadfully bothered about something, and I think it concerns you. Keep out of harm's way—for I have picked up something about another person.”

Geraldine had time to finish reading this and to ponder over the significant “P.S.” before Miss Elizabeth joined her. Both ladies passed a miserable morning; the elder was more disturbed than she had ever been known to be before, while the younger waited anxiously for some sign either from James or from her husband.

It was about four o'clock when, as she was walking restlessly about the paths close to the house, unwilling to go farther away from home when an arrival or a message might mean so much, Geraldine saw a cab drive up quickly through the park, and her husband jump out.

and come towards her. He looked so stern that all her old fear of him woke and appeared most plainly in her face as she met him. Her expression made him stop short a few paces from her ; and he asked rather harshly, raising his hat, without any attempt at a warmer greeting—

“ Is Doctor Ledbury indoors ? ”

“ No-o, Philip. He had a telegram last night, and started for town early this morning.”

“ Most unfortunate ! I hope you were civil to him—didn’t frighten him away ? ”

She did not condescend to answer the question, but, turning towards the house, asked if he had had luncheon. He said “ No,” and, as soon as it was prepared for him, she went with him into the dining-room and dutifully waited upon him while he ate a couple of biscuits and drank glass after glass of wine.

“ Are you not afraid of making your head ache, Philip ? ” she asked at last timidly, breaking a silence during which he had seemed to be too deeply immersed in gloomy thoughts to notice her presence.

“ No ! ” said he shortly ; and he rose from

the table, opened the door, and followed her out. "I am going for a walk ; I shall be back in time for dinner," he said, almost without looking at her.

And, passing into the outer hall, he took up his hat and went quickly out, leaving his wife in terror and suspense, wondering against whom this fresh display of passion was directed, and fearing lest, through some new device of Doctor Ledbury's, it might have for its object the unlucky James. When six o'clock struck, and still Captain Morrison had not returned, she could no longer bear the suspense ; and, dressing hurriedly for a walk, she went through the conservatory, crossed the garden and the park towards the back of the house, and almost ran along the lane that led to Corbyn's farm. As she went, she was startled by seeing a figure some little distance in front of her, dim and shadowy in the fog and the gathering night, dart from the centre to the edge of the lane, and disappear either in the deep ditch which bordered it or else into the hedge on the opposite side. She was much alarmed by this, and, as she fled past the spot where the figure

had vanished from her sight, she instinctively cast a scrutinizing glance in that direction, and noticed that the bare twigs of the hedge, which was low, thick, and thorny, still cracked and rustled at a point a couple of yards to the right of an old harrow, which was lying on the edge of the ditch. She ran on faster, not daring to stay to make any further investigation, though the incident troubled her excited mind and connected itself with the mysterious events which were making Waringham a place of terror and gloom to her.

As she approached the farmhouse, and could see the lights in the windows through the gathering darkness and the fog, she fancied that she detected signs of some unusual commotion in the rapid passing and repassing of a woman's figure in the glare of the fire of the farmhouse-kitchen, where the window-curtains were not drawn, and in the appearance and disappearance of a light in one of the upper rooms. She had just turned the corner by the shed where James had discovered her twenty years before, and thus come in sight of the whole front of the house, when the door

opened, and a gentleman came out, whose face she could not see; but by his gait she recognized Mr. Crosse. She ran forward to meet him, and her apprehensions were excited to fever-pitch by the shock which her appearance evidently gave him.

"Mr. Crosse, what is it? What has happened?"

"Why, my dear Mrs. Morrison, what is the matter with you? Must the sight of a doctor always forbode misfortune, even if he be taking an evening stroll, and happen to call at a farmhouse for a chat with a neighbour?"

"You can't put me off like that! Why do you try? When you caught sight of me you were not surprised, you were alarmed. What has happened to him? Is he hurt?"

The doctor tapped the ground with his foot impatiently, and seemed to hesitate what to say. At last he blurted out quickly—

"Ask your husband!"—and walked on past her without another word.

But, with a bitter cry—so low that it scarcely reached his ears—she rushed towards the farmhouse, and knocked hurriedly at the door.



## CHAPTER IX.

GERALDINE knocked two or three times at the farmhouse door without result, and at last she turned the handle and entered the passage. The sounds of voices in the farm-kitchen, which she had heard faintly as she stood outside, now burst loudly upon her ears, and she could distinguish the heart-broken sobs of Mrs. Corbyn, and her husband's gruff tones as he administered surly comfort.

"Don't take on so, lass, as if you were a bit of a thing of sixteen or so, instead of a woman pretty nigh forty-five. It's all ordered for the best by some one who knows more about the rights of it than you or me. And, after all, the poor gentleman hadn't such a pleasant time of it, by all accounts, that he should be more loth

than another to change it for a better, which we can all hope——”

He stopped, arrested by a loud cry from his wife. For, looking in at the door of the room, which she had pushed half-open without ceremony, was the white, drawn face of young Mrs. Morrison. She had listened, without uttering a sound, to the farmer's words; and now she entered quite quietly, and, with a cold gravity, which made the farmer watch her curiously, asked—

“Is Sir James Otway dead?”

Both husband and wife moved uneasily, and for a moment neither answered.

“Tell me, please—is he dead?” Geraldine repeated, in exactly the same tone.

Mrs. Corbyn dried her eyes hastily, and half-rose from her seat, with the light of an impetuous resolution in her kind face. But her husband checked her with a warning gesture of his big, rough hand; and she sank down again mutely, while he got up himself with the slow, rheumatic dignity of advancing years, and said, in tones full of grave respect—

“Something very sad has happened; there's

no good of our denying that, ma'am. But what it is and how it happened you will fittest learn from some one that can tell you more about it, and tell it better than we can."

"Who do you mean? This—has happened in your house; who can tell more about it than you?"

"Captain Morrison was here too, ma'am, as perhaps you know, and it is his wish that we should leave the telling of it to him. Won't you please let me see you safe home, ma'am? I promise you the captain won't keep you in suspense long."

"Where is he?"

"In the parlour opposite, ma'am, speaking to Mr. Crosse."

"Mr. Crosse has gone; I met him as I came in." She stood still, as if for a moment she had lost all memory of where she was or what she wished to do. Then she drew herself suddenly erect, and saying quickly, "I will go and speak to my husband," she hurried out of the room.

The farmer and his wife looked at each other apprehensively.

"John," said the latter, decisively, "you ought to have let me tell her. Told the way the captain will tell it, it'll scatter the poor thing's wits."

"It's not for us to come between husband and wife, lass. The captain has his ends to serve, and he ought to know his own business best. And, right or wrong, he must have his way now."

"Oh, John, what does it mean? You know more than you'll say, and you ought to let your wife know too. You know very well I can keep a secret. What did the captain say to you when he called you into the parlour, after we heard the pistol go off and Master James cry out?"

"He said, 'Keep out the women,' my lass, and set a fine example, which I mean to follow."

"Well, it's downright unkind of you, John, and it'll only make me set my wits to find out what I want to know another way."

"Spoke like a woman! However, you won't have to wait long; it'll all come out soon enough now. So, if you're wise, you'll just keep your tongue silent a little while about what you do

know. It's the least you can do for the Waringham folk, who have always been kind friends to us—from old Sir James's time before we were man and wife. What did Mr. Crosse say when you ran to fetch him?"

"He didn't say anything, but just nodded and said, 'At last!' as if he was quite used to being sent for to people that had been shot. He knows all about this mystery, the doctor does, or he'd never have come each day sitting for so long talking to Master James after he'd got quite round. But of course he didn't let anything out to me."

"No. He's a married man, and has learnt discretion this many a year."

Mrs. Corbyn was too much accustomed to this sort of easy jibing at her sex on the part of her husband, and too well aware how much it was worth, to show the least resentment. Knowing that the somewhat surly tone in which he had sustained his share of the talk was due, not to ill-temper, but to his inability to find adequate means of expression for the grief and the sympathy he shared in equal degree with herself over the misfortunes of the

Waringham household, she let the conversation drop ; and, having dried her eyes, she listened intently, under cover of being busy with her needlework, to the faint sounds of voices which reached the kitchen from time to time from the parlour on the opposite side of the passage.

Geraldine had entered the room quickly, had closed the door behind her, and then stood in front of it without advancing further, her eyes fixed upon her husband as if upon some object of unutterable horror. He was sitting in a horsehair-covered armchair by the high, old-fashioned fireplace, where a neglected fire was dimly burning. The room was in disorder ; the table which usually stood in the middle had been pushed against the sofa, the cushions and antimacassars of which had been dragged on to the floor. One of the window-curtains had been torn down and a chair overturned. A small lamp, the wick turned up too high, was flaring on the table, blackening the glass with smoke and filling the small room with a strong smell of oil. But Captain Morrison paid no attention to it.

If Geraldine had not entered with her mind

absorbed in one horrible thought of the work which had brought him there, his face, as he leaned back, with his head against the wooden framework of the chair, would have awakened in her some softer, kindlier feeling by the hard look of intense suffering which had drawn his pale face into furrows, and made him deaf as the dead to the slight sounds made by her entrance. But she had only one thought; he had murdered James.

After standing motionless by the door, trying to speak, but rendered unable to do so from lack of words to express the horror she felt, she said, in a choking, harsh voice—

“Where is he?”

Her husband turned his head, opened his closed eyes, and looked at her vacantly without answering. She came forward and repeated the question more calmly.

“Who? Who do you want?” he asked shortly.

“James—Sir James Otway!”

“What do you want with him?”

“What do I want with him? I—I want to see him—I must see him!”

"I am afraid that's impossible."

"Why?"

"He has met with an accident."

"At your hands?"

"No."

"At whose, then?"

"You shall know presently. I don't feel equal to entering upon a long explanation now. You can see I am tired—upset. Perhaps you will kindly put off the catechism for a couple of hours. Go home; I will follow you shortly, and satisfy your curiosity on every point. Are you not going to obey me?"

He put this question as she advanced still farther into the room, hearing every word, but occupied at the same time in examining the disordered objects around her. As his last sharply spoken words fell on her ears, she had passed him and gone round the table towards the window, looking at the curtain on the floor and the fallen chair. She turned to reply to her husband.

"No," she said firmly. "You have taunted me with passive obedience and you have cured me of it. I shall not go away until I have



learnt what has happened here this afternoon."

"I have told you already that an accident has happened."

"Do you think that will satisfy me? Do you expect me to go away smiling and contented with that assurance? Do you think that, if you had loved a person and prayed for him night and day for years, you could hear calmly from the lips of his declared enemy that he had met with an accident, and ask nothing more? And do you hope that I shall bow my head meekly and go without another word, just because you are my husband? There are limits to a slave's endurance, and there are limits to a wife's. You must satisfy me before I go."

She was white and trembling with conflicting passions of anger, terror, and despair, as she stood by the table a short distance from him, sobbing out the hot words which from time to time were scarcely audible. He drew himself slowly up in his chair and turned to face her.

"Don't imagine that I expect much from

you on the ground that you are my wife. There are limits to all your wifely virtues, and they are very soon reached. But on the ground that you are a reasoning human being, don't you think you are in a great hurry to charge me with having made away with this precious Sir James Otway? Heaven and earth couldn't succeed in convincing you that he was guilty of a murder, though the proofs were plain enough; yet now, when I am concerned, the mere fact that a gentleman whom you expected to see is not in the room with me is sufficient ground for you to accuse me of being his murderer. Is this all the advantage my proud position as your husband gives me?"

She paid no attention to him; but, after groping about in the feeble light of the smoking lamp, she picked up the overturned chair; and the next moment, feeling that her hand was wet, she held it up to the light and uttered a shrill shriek as she saw the dark red stain upon it. She fell down on her knees, sobbing like a child, shaking like a leaf, utterly broken down and reduced to the meekest, most miserable pleading.

“Philip,” she quavered out, “Philip, let me see him, tell me where he is—alive or dead. Have some pity upon me; I am at your mercy, I will never contradict you or resist you again if you will have pity on me now. Look at me; aren’t you satisfied? Isn’t my spirit broken enough? You shall treat me as you like—just as you say a husband may treat his wife—neglect me, strike me; I will bear everything; only—only let me see James now. I must, I must. Oh, Heaven, my heart is breaking! I shall die at your feet if you refuse.”

She could only see dimly, through her fast-flowing tears, the face of the man to whom she was pleading; she had to wait for the sound of his voice to tell her whether her prayer was successful. All her energy seemed suddenly gone; it did not occur to her to search the house, to wonder whether it was James whom she had seen in the lane; she could do nothing but sob helplessly, crushed at last, after six months of suspense and misery on account of her old playfellow, by the mysterious fate which had befallen him.

There was silence when she had finished

speaking. She continued to sob bitterly, while her husband for some moments said nothing. At last she got up, with an impulse of energy, and groped her way, still crying, towards the door.

"Where are you going?" asked her husband, in a hoarse voice.

"I am going to find him. Since you won't help me, I'll find a better guide."

"Stop! I will help you; you shall see him. Come back, and wait for me."

She hesitated; and her husband, coming slowly to the door where she was standing, laid his hand gently enough on her arm and led her to the nearest chair.

"Stay here, and I'll come and fetch you."

Something unusual in the tone of his voice made her look up; and the sight of his face, as he stooped to say these words close to her ear, froze back her tears and appalled her. She had seen him angry often enough, she had seen him hurt by her own coldness; but she had never before seen his face branded by the savage agony which marked it now. For one moment

it touched her ; she instinctively threw out her right hand to detain him, that she might question him sympathetically. The expression of his sensitive face changed at once ; but at the same moment her eyes fell upon the stain which still showed on her hand, and, withdrawing it quickly, she shrank back into herself with a shudder ; and then she heard one sharply drawn breath escape him as he opened the door and left her.

She listened to his lagging tread as he very slowly mounted the stairs, and she heard him open a door above ; but, as the room he entered was not immediately over her head, she could distinguish no further sound. She did not attempt to disobey him and satisfy her burning impatience sooner by following him upstairs—she was afraid of her husband ; the terrible look on his face she ascribed to remorse, and, while her horror grew greater with every moment of spectre-haunted suspense, it was horror mingled with involuntary respect for a strong nature in pain. She had sat rigidly listening for some moments, when her intent ears again

heard the slight sound of the opening of a door above, and her husband's slow footsteps along the passage upstairs.

"Geraldine!" he called.

The kitchen door opened at the moment that Geraldine stepped into the passage. Mrs. Corbyn appeared, and asked timidly if anybody called.

"It is only my husband calling me, Mrs. Corbyn," she replied, trying to smile into the tear-stained, sympathetic face of the farmer's wife, who gave a hasty glance up the stairs, saw that Captain Morrison's back was turned, and whispered into the lady's ear, with surreptitious eagerness—

"Don't take on so, ma'am, and don't be too hard to him, or you'll be sorry afterwards—indeed you will!"

Then she hurried back into the kitchen, leaving Geraldine bewildered and apprehensive as she went up the staircase. Her husband, who was standing at a door with his fingers upon the handle, said, in a low voice—

"Can you bear a sight which will be a terrible shock to you? Can you bear it quietly,

I mean, and keep your sobs and moans till by-and-by?"

"Yes," said Geraldine, coldly, braced up by the harsh and sneering tone.

"Very well; that is a promise, remember;" and he opened the door, and led the way into a small, low-ceilinged bedroom, on the painted wooden dressing-table of which was a tallow candle. He signed to her to pass him into the room, and when, close to the dressing-table, she turned, she saw that on the big, mahogany, curtained bedstead behind the door something, covered over by a sheet, was lying. Her husband watched her; but she kept her word. A shudder shook her from head to foot; but she did not utter a sound. As soon as the convulsion of her limbs was past, she advanced to the side of the bed, and, before her husband could prevent her, lifted the sheet off the head of the figure. Then, after one look at the still face, she replaced the sheet with steady hands and turned away.

"Now I am ready to go," she said quietly; and they left the room together. "Will you tell me all about it now?" she asked, with the

same frigid meekness, as soon as they were outside.

"Not now ; I have something to say to Mrs. Corbyn. There are watching and funeral arrangements to be made, and I must speak to her about them. I wish you to return home without me at once."

She began to tremble again, as he said these words in a matter-of-fact tone which jarred upon her horribly.

"Ah," he continued drily, "I guessed how much your vows of eternal submission, if I only 'let you see him, alive or dead,' were worth !"

"No, Philip, you are mistaken. I will keep my word ; I will never oppose you again. I will obey you like a slave. What else can I do ? I have nothing else to live for now."

She lifted his hand with lifeless meekness to her lips, and, printing a cold kiss of obedience on her husband's fingers, she went downstairs and out of the farmhouse without another word. Captain Morrison started forward as she left him, but restrained himself



as he was on the point of crying out to her. He leaned over the banisters of the landing and watched her go out of the house ; then, with a sigh heavy with the whole weight of the utmost sorrow a man can bear, he went back slowly to the room he had just left.

## CHAPTER X.

It was nine o'clock that evening before Captain Morrison returned to the Hall. Dinner was kept back, and then hurried over in uneasy and fitful attempts on the part of Geraldine and of Miss Elizabeth, who guessed that something serious had happened, to keep the conversation going, as if the absence of the master of the house was a trifling accident. Geraldine dared not speak of James's death until she had learnt the details of it. She was very white, heavy-eyed, and listless ; but she was no longer tearful ; and this terrible climax to the misery of long months found her able to bear up under the horror and the mystery of it with the calm dignity inspired in a strong nature by a grief without remedy.

When the ladies went into the drawing-

room, Geraldine tried to occupy herself with some fancy-work, sitting by the side of Miss Eleanor, who, contrary to her usual practice when any slight disturbance of the household routine took place, had made very few comments on Captain Morrison's absence, and had been somewhat silent during dinner. But now she would not rest on her sofa; she fidgeted, she sighed, she uttered disconcerting little moans, and at last she raised herself on her elbow and croaked out in her thin, weak tones—

“Geraldine, I must speak. I don't know how you and Elizabeth feel about this; but I am very uncomfortable, and, if Captain Morrison were my husband, I should think he was dead—I know I should! He has never been a favourite of mine, you know, for I cannot help my instinctive abhorrence for the sanguinary profession of a soldier. But he is never inconsiderate, and whatever slaughter he may have been guilty of on the battle-field, he has, at least, never before been so inconsiderate as to keep us waiting for dinner. There has been some-

thing altogether wrong about this household lately; I have felt it frequently, though I have said nothing about it until now, and now I feel—I have a presentiment that something dreadful is going to happen. If I were you, Geraldine, I would send out in search of Captain Morrison.”

The young lady rose and tried to caress the old lady into calmness with trembling fingers.

“You need not be alarmed for him, Aunt Eleanor. Whoever may be in danger, you may be sure he will return safely,” she said bitterly.

But the black eyes remained fixed upon her piercingly.

“Oh, Geraldine, you are too hard!” said the crone-like creature earnestly. “He is your husband, and he has been unhappy lately—I have seen it. You ought to be kind to him, whatever he has done.”

Geraldine, touched by this stray shot, left the old lady in remorse at the look of pain and uneasiness which her words had called up in the young wife’s face. She walked to

the end of the room and opened the piano ; but she had scarcely struck the first notes of an old piece she knew by heart when she heard the entrance-bell, and her fingers fell idly on the keys as she listened to the butler's footsteps on the pavement of the entrance-hall, to the opening of the door, and to sounds of several voices, among which she recognized that of Mr. Crosse. She sprang up, across to the door, and into the outer hall, where she waited for some moments listening. She heard the voice of Farmer Corbyn without being able to distinguish what he said ; then the gruff tones of Sam, one of the farm-labourers ; an exclamation from Johnson, and a few authoritative words from the doctor ; these she heard and understood—

“ Carefully, carefully—a little to the left ! ”

And she heard the tramp of men's feet in the passage. They were bringing something in. She fell back against the door through which she had just passed, more overcome by this unexpected shock than she had been by the sight of her old playfellow as he lay stiff and still on the bed at the farmhouse.

For this ghastly end to all her efforts, all her prayers on behalf of her beloved guardian's nephew recalled suddenly to her mind the vow she had made never to rest until she had brought him back in honour to Waringham. Well, he had come now, with the honour due to the dead! She closed her eyes to keep back the tears that sprang to them, and set her teeth that no weak sound of wailing might escape her; and she heard the voices and the footsteps as they advanced from the entrance into the large hall, and she heard her husband say—

“Not upstairs; into the library.”

The next minute Mr. Crosse's hand shook her shoulder gently.

“Rouse yourself, my dear Mrs. Morrison; don't be alarmed. It is nothing serious; your husband has only sprained his ankle.”

“My husband?”

She had opened her eyes at the doctor's touch, and she now turned them towards the library door, through which Captain Morrison was being carried on a rough stretcher formed by a narrow door which had been taken off its

hinges at the farmhouse for this purpose. Mr. Corbyn and Sam and the butler soon came out, and, after waiting a few minutes until they had left the hall, Geraldine knocked at the library door. The doctor opened it.

"How is he?" she asked perfunctorily, with hard, dry eyes.

"He is all right—at least he soon will be, if he allows his foot to rest. Will you give directions for a comfortable sofa to be brought in here, or a small bedstead? The sofa here is too narrow."

Glad of some occupation, Geraldine retired, gave the necessary orders, and went into the drawing-room to calm the fears of the old ladies, who had heard the commotion and been much alarmed by it. Mr. Crosse came in before long with a comforting assurance that there was no cause for any anxiety; and, soon after his departure, the Misses Otway went to their rooms, after bidding good night to Geraldine, who watched them go upstairs, and then returned to the large hall and knocked softly at the library door. The senior housemaid, a staid woman of thirty-five, who had

been appointed by Mr. Crosse to watch by Captain Morrison during the night, opened the door.

"How is the captain now?"

"He is rather restless, ma'am; the doctor said he would be."

"And he told you to sit by him?" asked Geraldine, to whom this arrangement seemed portentous.

"Yes, ma'am."

"I see. I will take your place in ten minutes, and you can go into the drawing-room and make yourself as comfortable as you can there for the night. I will watch here, and you will be near in case I want you."

"Who's that?" now asked her husband's voice irritably.

Geraldine left the servant to answer him, went to her room, and returned in a few minutes in her dressing-gown, prepared to watch through the night. She opened the library door softly, dismissed Gainsford by a gesture, and slipped into the chair vacated by the maid. Captain Morrison appeared not to notice this change of nurse, but continued to



move restlessly on the bed which had been made up for him, and it was not until he stretched out his hand towards a glass containing some cooling drink, which had been placed on the table beside him, that he showed recognition of his wife's presence as she rose and, taking up the glass, held it to his lips; but, instead of tasting it, he looked up at her and said gruffly—

“What are you here for?”

“I am here to nurse you,” she answered gently, but without either the meekness which in her he loathed or the love which he longed for.

“To nurse me! What do you mean? There is nothing the matter with me to require all this unaccustomed attention, and this sacrifice of your rest is entirely uncalled for. You had better go to bed.”

The words were about as ungracious as they could be—the tone in which they were spoken was neither affectionate nor amiable; but still he leaned against her shoulder as she helped him to raise himself, and he kept her a long time holding the glass for him while he slowly

quenched his thirst. Then he raised his eyes again to her face with a hard, keen look, glanced again at the glass and back to her.

"I suppose you don't want to poison me?" he said grimly. "But I must confess I don't understand this new devotion after the pleasant things you said to me at the farm. This fresh burst of wifely duty, I suppose, is meant as a rebuke for my villainy—coals of fire on my murderer's head."

"No it isn't. It——" Her voice broke, and she was silent.

"Well?"

"I simply want to act rightly towards you. I dare say you won't believe me. If you will not let me try to drown the misery I am suffering in waiting upon you and doing my best to be to you what a wife should be during her husband's illness, I think I shall go mad."

"Then I have to thank James Otway's death for this recognition of your duties towards me?"

She shivered and involuntarily tried to withdraw herself from him. But he leaned against her more heavily and clutched her left

hand, while his breath came in gasps and his eyes began to glow with passion.

"No, no. I accept your services, whatever the motive of them may be. And you may be satisfied on one point: it was not I who shot James Otway."

"Who was it?"

"James Otway himself."

"Will you swear that?"

"Yes, I swear it."

She began to tremble so violently, as she still stood supporting him, that he put his arm round her and whispered huskily—

"Don't be so miserable; you—you think there is nothing left in the world for you; but you are mistaken. You will be happy some day, I swear. Be kind to me; I have been wretched, too, lately. Just be kind to me until—until my ankle gets well; I will ask no more than that from you. Don't you think you can promise me that?"

His passion-lit face, under the dark skin of which the red blood was glowing, drew closer and closer to hers; his hot hands clung more convulsively to her shrinking form, his voice

grew lower, more broken, as he pleaded with the savage earnestness of a man whose very life hangs on the answer for which he is praying. Her heart was touched and her eyes filled.

"I am very miserable," she whispered timidly. "It makes me selfish—makes me forget that anybody else can be as unhappy as I am. I have been cruel and wicked to you to-day; I will atone to you, I will be good to you from this moment. My poor Philip—see—I will be kind to you!"

She drew his head very gently on to her shoulder and kissed his forehead lightly just where the dark hair curled about his temples. More than ever before, the flood of his passionate recognition of her kindness astonished and even alarmed her. For a few moments he lay trembling, panting on her breast, and then burst into a torrent of hot tears and heavy sobs that made him shake and shiver in her arms, as he incoherently whispered thanks and blessings and clasped her to him with a terrible fervour, which suggested that of a drowning man clutching at the spar which may prolong

his battle for life. Her alarm changed to pity for him, and she soothed the tumult she had roused with real tenderness, and dried his eyes with her own handkerchief, and held his head between her hands while she begged him not to excite himself so much in his feverish state, but to lie down and take the rest he needed.

"You are very ill," she said authoritatively. "There is more than your sprained ankle the matter with you, I am sure. You are weak and restless, and your hands and lips are parched and as hot as fire. If you do not rest, I am afraid you will soon be in a fever."

Her words seemed to strike him, and he instantly tried to recover himself, and let her lay him down upon his pillow without a protest.

"Yes, yes, you are right," he replied. "A sprained ankle is a serious thing, and I am restless and excited to-night. I must not let myself get feverish, for I have a great deal to do just now, and I must be fit for business to-morrow. Mr. Fielding will be down here in the morning, for one thing, I expect; I telegraphed to him, knowing he was a relative

of Sir James's, and you will have to see him when he comes, and tell him all about it. It will be painful for you, I know, Geraldine ; but, if I am not well enough to see him myself, I am afraid I must ask you to do this for me."

"See Lindley Fielding!" faltered she ; then, remembering her promise to her husband, she said dutifully, "Very well ; I will see him if you wish. Now you must lie quietly and try to sleep."

"Will you—would you mind bringing your chair nearer, and sitting where I can see you, in case I want anything?"

She sat down obediently by the bedside, and when presently his hand stole towards her, she advanced her own to meet it, and he smiled with a radiance of passionate joy over his pale face and whispered—

"Geraldine, Geraldine, you are good, you are true-hearted ! You shall be happy some day, I swear it !"

And then little by little the firm clasp of his fingers round hers relaxed, and as the fire grew low and the night wore on, he fell quietly asleep. It was not until seven o'clock next

morning that his wife left him to get a couple of hours' rest before breakfast-time. There was a note from Doctor Ledbury on the table, which Geraldine read and passed to Miss Elizabeth, who had evidently recognized the hand-writing, which was quite unknown to the younger lady. It was dated from London the evening before, and recorded his safe arrival, his regrets that he had been forced to leave Waringham without farewell to Captain Morrison. It was quite a formal note, and Geraldine took it to her husband with his own letters. He was rather irritable this morning, and his first greeting was cool and not destitute of his old suspicion; but she would not accept his coldness as a rebuff, and she took his breakfast from the servant at the door, brought it to him, and waited upon him so very sweetly that, as she removed the tray and re-arranged his pillows, he detained her to kiss him, and said quickly—

“There's a kind little wife! You are not offended by my ill-temper? I didn't mean to be harsh to you; but my ankle pains me this morning.”

"You are sure there is nothing the matter with you but the sprain? You look very ill this morning."

"No, no; I'm getting on all right; but I think I must have turned my foot again in the night; as I tell you, it pains me."

"You must see Mr. Crosse at once, then. I will send——"

"No, no; he has promised to call this morning, so you need not send. Now I must write some letters, unless you will write them for me."

She ran for her desk, and when she returned he was looking at Doctor Ledbury's note again. He had read it through for the first time without comment; now he said—

"Doctor Ledbury will be dreadfully upset by this—unhappy affair, won't he?"

She started, and the blood rushed into her pale face, while her husband watched her closely.

"Yes, I suppose he will," she answered, as calmly as she could; and, though Captain Morrison noticed her confusion, he said nothing about it.



She had written three or four letters at his dictation when they heard the sounds of an arrival, and Johnson came to say that Mr. Fielding was in the drawing-room. Geraldine rose, trembling and hoarse, and, with a submissively inquiring glance at her husband, was on her way to the door when he called her back. She was struck by a certain look of steady determination which had grown every moment stronger since the announcement of the visitor's arrival.

"Geraldine," he said, "you will satisfy Mr. Fielding's anxiety as fully as you possibly can. Tell him I am sincerely sorry that an accident to my foot prevents my seeing him myself. Tell him I was at the farm a few minutes after Sir James's attempt on his own life, and I saw him before he died. Ask him to stay here to-night, and I will see him."

"Philip, you are not in a fit state to see anybody ; I am sure of it. You look ghastly, and your voice is quite weak this morning. I will tell him just what you like ; but you must not see him yourself."

He raised himself to look at her, and smiled,

as if pleased by her anxiety on his account. Then he said—

“Well, I won’t see him until I am better, if you like. But you must not tell him you are alarmed about me ; you must only say what I have told you—remember.”

“Very well, Philip.”

She left him, and went into the drawing-room, where Lindley Fielding started up nervously from the sofa, where he had been talking low and earnestly to Miss Eleanor, who remained trembling after Geraldine’s entrance, as if something in the conversation she had just held had alarmed her.

“How do you do, my dear Mrs. Morrison ? But indeed I dare scarcely ask how you are, for I am sure that this shock has affected you more than any one. I can hardly even believe it yet. Can it really be true, as my cousin has just told me, that poor James Otway committed suicide yesterday ? Captain Morrison telegraphed to me the sad tidings last night, and I came by the first train this morning, hoping against hope that some mistake would prove to have been made.”

“It is true—tell him it is true !” quavered

out the poor old lady, who had not long learnt the tidings herself, and who now spoke as if she had found her cousin difficult to convince of the truth of her information.

"Yes, I am sorry to say it is true," said Geraldine, solemnly; "my husband was at the farm a few minutes after the shot was fired, and was, I believe, present when Sir James died. He is very sorry that he cannot receive you himself, but he sprained his ankle as he was returning from the farm last night, and has not left his room since. You will stay here to-night, will you not? My husband begs that you will. We are both very sorry your visit has to take place in such unhappy circumstances. Of course you will want to go to the farm and see poor James?"

"Well—er—yes, I suppose—I suppose I had better," said Lindley with a good deal of evident reluctance. He hated the very suggestion of death, and the idea of looking upon a dead man's face appalled him. "Of course some of his relatives ought to go and see that—that it's all right," he wound up inappropriately.

"Oh, if by 'all right' you mean the cer-

tainty that he really is dead, 'some of his relatives' have already ascertained that. I saw—I saw James—dead—last night," she assured him, her voice shaking.

She had spoken with some hardness, for Lindley's manner jarred upon her terribly. It seemed to her that he was more concerned in assuring himself that James was really dead than in grieving over the circumstance; and the words he now uttered confirmed this strange impression.

"I really don't see that there is any necessity for me to go to the farm, Mrs. Morrison," he said in a tone in which she chose to fancy she could detect great relief. "I am sure the sight would quite upset me, for I was very much attached to the poor fellow. Do you know what led to his committing the—the rash act? Surely it was very sudden!"

"He had been unfortunate, singularly unfortunate, for some time past," she answered rather significantly. "I believe his persistent and strange ill-luck preyed upon his mind."

"Dear me, dear me!" exclaimed Lindley, who was growing very restless under the dry

hardness of her manner towards him. "How—how extremely—er—sad!" After a moment's pause, he added impulsively—"I am very sorry I cannot see Captain Morrison."

"Has Doctor Ledbury heard of James's death?" croaked out the shrill voice of the invalid Eleanor.

Both Lindley and Geraldine started; and the former said hastily—

"Of course, I informed him at once—went myself to his house, which is not ten minutes' walk from mine, and told him. I never saw a man so overwhelmed—never."

He stopped short in the middle of this speech, which he was pouring out hastily, and turned quickly from Geraldine, who was listening frigidly, to the more sympathetic Eleanor.

"I expect—I quite expect he will be down here to-day," he continued. "His nerves are more robust than mine in such a case, owing, of course, not to his temperament, but to his profession. Doctors have to control their feelings."

"Coming here to-day?" exclaimed Geraldine, in a loud, ringing voice which caused Miss Otway

to shriek and Lindley to start up with gloomy eyes and damp forehead. There was a silence of a few seconds, which Lindley broke with an awkward laugh.

"You quite alarmed me, Mrs. Morrison, my nerves having been already a good deal shaken by the shock."

"When is he coming?" she interrupted sharply.

"Indeed I cannot tell you. He said last night that he would be here early; but he did not say by what train he should come."

"'He said last night.' Then you saw him last night?"

"Certainly," said Lindley, shifting his eyes from her face to Eleanor's and thence to the fireplace. "I have already told you, Mrs. Morrison, that, on receipt of Captain Morrison's telegram, I at once informed Doctor Ledbury of the sad occurrence, knowing, as I did, that he was our unfortunate relative's best friend."

Geraldine laughed in such a hard, ironical manner that it was impossible for either of her hearers to mistake its significance.

"Geraldine, what do you mean? You are

frightening me dreadfully!" broke in the querulous old lady's voice.

"Nothing, Aunt Eleanor; I am sorry I frightened you," she replied, recovering herself and speaking in a different tone. "Mr. Fielding, you started so early that I am sure you have not had breakfast," she continued, as she touched the bell; and she turned the talk to lighter subjects until, excusing herself on the plea that her husband wanted her, she left the duties of entertainment to Miss Eleanor. But she was stopped before she reached the library door by Johnson, who told her that Mr. Crosse was with his master; and, although she waited in the inner hall that she might run to meet the doctor as he came out and satisfy herself concerning the condition of her husband, whose reticence on the subject caused her some anxiety, he managed to elude her by leaving the library very quietly and pretending to be deaf when she called to him as he slipped hurriedly through the front door. She would have followed him, but that she knew any questions he did not wish to answer would be met by evasion. She knocked at the door of the

library ; but her husband called out that he was engaged, and asked her to come back in an hour. Disturbed by this answer, she asked the butler whether any one was with his master and he said, Yes ; young Mr. Bamber and a person had been with him for the last twenty minutes ; they were there when the doctor came.

“Was the other person a stranger ?” asked Geraldine, who fancied old Johnson knew more than he chose to tell her.

“Yes, ma’am—at least, he is a stranger to me.”

“What is he like ?”

“He is short and dark and very thin, with close-cut whiskers—very respectably dressed, ma’am.”

“Not a gentleman ?”

“No, ma’am.”

Geraldine went upstairs and dressed for a walk, very much disturbed by this information ; for she remembered her request to Reginald to set a detective to watch Doctor Ledbury’s movements from the moment of his leaving the Hall, and she was paralyzed by fears concerning the disclosures the officer



might have to make. She went through the conservatory towards the farm, giving herself the pretext that she must ask Mrs. Corbyn for further details of the horrible scene which had taken place there; but she was half-conscious that the strongest motive which led her in that direction was the longing to look upon James's face again. But she was disappointed. All the blinds were drawn down, and no one answered her knock at the farmhouse door; so she went in and looked into the kitchen. No one was there. She closed the door softly, went lightly up the stairs and tried the door of the room where she had seen James lying. But it was locked—she could see through the key-hole that the blind was drawn down, and she turned away shuddering and miserable, struck with the terrible loneliness of this silent house, with its neglected dead, and stole downstairs again. At the door of the sitting-room, where she had met and accused her husband, she paused, not wishing to go in, but arrested by an irresistible fascination. It also was locked; but she remembered that the window had no fastening, and was easily opened from the out-

side. Going quickly out, still without meeting any one, she pushed up the window of the sitting-room, pulled aside the blind with a trembling hand, and peered in. The room was in exactly the same state as on the previous evening; the blackened lamp had been extinguished, but it still stood on the table; one curtain lay on the floor, the cloth was half-dragged from the table. One ghastly secret, which the dim lamp-light had not revealed, was laid bare by the glare of the morning. A great dark stain spread over the floor between the window and the table, dyed the tablecloth on one side, and showed on the chintz of the overturned chair. The sight filled Geraldine, prepared as she had been for some trace of the scene of the previous afternoon, with horror; she pulled down the window and turned away, without seeing Mrs. Corbyn's face, stained with tears of sympathy, looking at her retreating figure sorrowfully from an upper window.

When she reached the Hall, she received another shock; for the butler announced that Doctor Ledbury had arrived, and was in the drawing-room with the ladies and Mr. Fielding.

"Does your master know?"

"Yes, ma'am. He told me to tell you as soon as you came in, when he heard you had gone out."

She went straight to the drawing-room, very slowly, very reluctantly, as if there were some sight or scene awaiting her there which would be almost more than she could bear. Her appearance was the signal for intense excitement in the little group round the fireplace. Doctor Ledbury advanced to meet her, dressed in black and wearing an air of deepest solemnity. She shrank back, in spite of herself, as he held out his hand; but, affecting to see in this movement merely a sign of physical weakness, he drew her arm through his with a firm clasp before she could protest, and led her to a chair beside the old ladies. It was curious that the presence of Lindley Fielding, who was extremely nervous in spite of an elation which he in vain tried to hide, seemed to restore all the self-confidence and dignity which Miss Eleanor had missed from Doctor Ledbury's manner during his last visit.

"I am extremely sorry to hear that I

shall not have the pleasure of seeing Captain Morrison this morning," said he, when he had sat down with easy assurance by Geraldine's side.

"But that need not delay the statement you have to make, my dear fellow," said Lindley, quickly. "At a time like this, when these ladies are all deploring the loss of one who was as dear to them—almost, as to yourself, the tidings we have to break to them will, we may hope, prove some sort of consolation."

Geraldine sat quite still, listening, waiting. Miss Elizabeth glanced restlessly from one face to another. Miss Eleanor was the only one who was quite unprepared for the revelation about to be made.

"What does he mean, Elizabeth?" she croaked out, in a whisper.

"What do I mean, my dear cousin?" replied Lindley, in a tone which grew more jubilant in spite of himself. "Why, I mean that, to replace, as far as may be, the James Otway we have lost, Heaven has appointed me the happy ambassador of the consoling tidings that there is another, and I may say, worthier James

Otway to keep up the family name, and, we will hope, to restore the family fortunes, and that the man whom you have known as Doctor Ledbury is poor Charles's son, and Geraldine's brother."

"Impossible!" cried Eleanor. "Geraldine, Elizabeth, it is not true!"

But Geraldine and Miss Elizabeth were both silent.

"I will not—I cannot believe it! We should have heard of it before——"

"I think you can see that you are the only person in the room who has not heard of it before, my dear Eleanor," said Lindley, glancing at the disturbed but not astonished faces of the two other ladies. "As for James's reason for not confessing himself openly before this, it is one which, I must say, does him great honour."

"It is merely a point of justice with me," put in the other gravely and modestly. "I could not, during the life of my Cousin James, whom I had learnt to love as if he had really been the brother he delighted to call himself, deprive him of the position he had always held as the heir of Sir Charles, whom I had

only a short time before his death learnt to be my father."

This was a remarkably generous speech—rather too neat perhaps, but short and to the point; yet it failed to draw any response from its hearers. There was a dead silence when he ended, until Miss Eleanor's voice again broke in with a querulous objection.

"But James couldn't inherit the property, because he was under sentence of penal servitude for life; so I don't understand your motive."

"But he had escaped, and my claiming the title and the property would have set the police in motion after him again while he was actually under my care."

"I don't understand it at all," again quavered the old lady, "and I think Mr. Massey or some lawyer ought to be sent for to inquire into this."

"Mr. Massey will be here before the week is out," said Lindley, triumphantly. "I saw him not long ago, and I have some letters of his here which will prove to you that he was one of the principal agents in establishing

the claim of the present Sir James Otway. In the mean time, Eleanor, your sister can satisfy you, as she saw the certificates of Charles's marriage and his children's birth in my hands on the night your brother died."

"But that does not prove that this is one of his children," persisted Eleanor, encouraged by a look almost of approval from her sister, who was unusually silent and crestfallen.

"Ask Mrs. Symes. She was present when poor Charles acknowledged his son."

"Then why didn't he proclaim himself at once?" questioned the old lady, in the silence of all the rest.

"I have already explained that," retorted Lindley, who was becoming rather restless, and who was much relieved when the butler entered the room with a request from Captain Morrison that Doctor Ledbury, Mr. Fielding and the ladies would come to him in the library.

Eleanor excused herself, afraid of some scene which would disturb her nerves, already shaken by the revelation made by Lindley,

and by her own unusual display of energy in questioning the truth of it. The rest went at once to the library, where preparations had been made which showed that importance was attached by its occupant to the scene about to take place there.

The bed had been taken away; the tall screen, which usually shut in a small space round the fireplace from the draught, had been pushed back into a corner, to make way for chairs arranged for the expected visitors; Captain Morrison had forsaken his favourite armchair, and lay with his back to the light on the sofa which had been placed by the fireside. He did not offer to shake hands with either of the gentlemen when they came in; but—apologizing in a grave voice for having to ask them to come to him, as he had sprained his ankle on the previous afternoon—and he pointed to his bandaged foot—he said he believed they had come that day to make some important statements, and he should feel very much interested if they would let him hear them.

Both gentlemen seemed astonished and



somewhat disconcerted by this intimation that some inkling of their business had reached Captain Morrison's ears; but Lindley recovered himself almost immediately, and at once took upon himself the office of narrator of a story, the proofs of which, in letters and other papers, he produced as he proceeded.

## CHAPTER XI.

LINDLEY's story began at the time when the late Sir Charles, five and twenty years ago, had been stationed with his regiment in Ireland. Already approaching middle age, he had fallen in love with a beautiful peasant-girl, the daughter of a small farmer, and privately married her. But she was a wild, high-spirited girl, very young and very fickle; she soon got tired of her prosy, middle-aged husband, and, two months before her confinement, she left him for an old love of hers, a good-looking young Irishman in her own rank of life. Ten weeks later, having been unable in the mean time to discover any trace of her, Sir Charles received a visit from her sister, who came with the news that Kathleen, his wife, had died in giving birth to a child, who was since

dead also. The woman brought back to him some trifling trinkets he had given to his wife, together with the loving letters which she had scarcely been able to read; she also told him where his wife and child were buried, and, though, as there were no names over the graves which he visited by his sister-in-law's direction, and he could not see the register on account of the absence of the priest, he had to take his sister-in-law's story upon trust, no motive for deception had occurred to the simple-hearted gentleman, and he had never doubted the truth of it.

But Lindley now declared that Kathleen had sent her sister to Sir Charles to cut off the last tie between them, that she might live undisturbed with the twin-children, a boy and a girl, who had been born to her, and with the man of her choice. It was only when a new family began to absorb her attention that it occurred to her to dispose of her two legitimate children by bringing the girl to England and leaving it within sight of her husband's home, and by consigning the boy to the care of her sister, who was well-married

and childless. From a vague fear of the terrors the law might bring upon her if she "told a lie in writing," the ignorant Kathleen had caused the birth of the children to be registered in her husband's name; and it was as James Otway, though ignorant of the story of his birth, that the boy was adopted by his aunt and her husband. They were fond and proud of him, and as they rose in the world they gave him a good education, and finally sent him to Dublin University with the design of making a doctor of him, taking pride in the fact that by their care they had restored him to the position of a gentleman, of which his mother's rash flight had robbed him.

"It was on the occasion of my going to Dublin to visit our late unlucky relative, the other James Otway, who was then in prison," continued Lindley, "that I met the present Sir James by chance at an hotel, and was so much struck by the name and by his resemblance to some of our family that I never rested till I had unearthed the whole story. Although Sir Charles's nephew was by that

time under sentence of penal servitude for life, I could not induce Sir James to come forward and present himself to his father; it was only when I had thought of pressing upon him the disadvantage under which his sister was placed by his silence that he permitted me to break the tidings to Sir Charles. You all know the violent effect the announcement that he was the father of two children, both of whom were alive, had upon him. I introduced my friend as the doctor, to prevent any disturbance on the part of Sir Charles's relatives." Elizabeth's lips tightened. "Sir Charles acknowledged him as his son in a will which has been kept concealed until this moment by Sir James who, on the sudden appearance of his cousin escaped from prison, refused to take his rightful place as his father's heir while the man who had always held that position might still claim it."

Lindley produced the will which, he said, Sir Charles had made on the night of his death, in favour of his son by his wife Kathleen. It was in Lindley's own handwriting, was duly signed in a feeble, scrawling

hand by Sir Charles himself, and the signatures of Mrs. Symes and of the butler as witnesses followed.

Captain Morrison listened to the story with grave attention, examined the will, the certificates, and certain letters which Lindley produced at different points in support of his statements, and said at last—

“ I think your case is perfectly clear, and I acknowledge that, through a member of my household, I was not altogether unprepared for this strange revelation. Of course Mr. Massey must be summoned over here—— ”

“ I have already written to him,” interrupted Lindley.

“ And no doubt, Sir James, you will have no difficulty in calling witnesses to prove your identity ? ”

“ None at all, Captain Morrison. My aunt and her husband are both alive, and, though my mother died some years ago, the farmer for whom she deserted my father is alive, and can give you all the details any one can want.”

“ And for your later life. I suppose, there

would be no difficulty in continuing the chain of evidence in your favour ? ”

“None at all, I assure you.” “Not the least,” chimed in both claimant and supporter together.

“Then I can only say that the one thing in the whole story which remains astonishing is the disinterestedness which kept you silent so long, Sir James, in the interest of a murderer, an escaped convict, a heartless and—brutal—seducer ! ”

For the first time, his hard, dry manner changed, and his voice faltered. Sir James bowed slightly, but seemed rather uneasy ; Lindley’s eyes roved restlessly from his friend to the speaker and back again ; Elizabeth sat upright, but was cowed and silent ; Geraldine drew a sharp breath of pain as her husband uttered the last words, but kept her eyes fixed upon him with an intent look of inquiry which was not without a suggestion of feverish trust in him.

“It is a most singular and awful stroke of what people call the irony of fate that this undeserving wretch should have gone to his grave

without knowing—I won't say appreciating, for that would have been beyond him—the noble sacrifice you made for him, Sir James."

"Indeed, you are right, Captain Morrison ; no one deplores his death so much as I do," said the new Sir James composedly, while Lindley evidently grew more restless and Geraldine more excited. "But you overrate my sacrifice as much as you underrate my unlucky namesake's good qualities. I had a position of my own ; at least, I was rapidly making one, while poor James was too weak to have carved one out for himself, if he had been deprived of that one to which he believed himself born."

Lindley recovered his self-possession as he noted his companion's composure in face of Captain Morrison's strangely grave and monotonous manner, which, to his experienced eyes, suggested danger.

"Perhaps you are right, Sir James ; he lived for some time under your care, and you had more opportunities of studying both his character and his constitution than I have had."

Lindley turned pale, and his hands began to twitch and to tremble ; the new Sir James



remained perfectly calm ; both the ladies kept still as statues under the strongest efforts of self-control.

“ I must repeat once more, Sir James,” continued Captain Morrison, whose speech grew slower and more deliberate every minute, “ that had the story of your noble and disinterested conduct remained unsupported, it would have appeared scarcely credible ; but, in order that for once poetical justice should be awarded to an heroic act, Heaven has raised up a witness to the truth of your story whom no one will dare to doubt. James Otway,” he called, raising his voice a little, “ come forward and give your benefactor the thanks which are his due ! ”

Captain Morrison fixed his eyes upon the screen thrust back into the corner of the room ; the last words were scarcely out of his mouth when every one turned instinctively, as they heard a sound behind them. A moment later, pale, shaking from head to foot, and looking, as he stumbled nervously forward into the room, the guiltiest wretch that ever skulked about the earth, James Otway appeared before them.

Lindley leapt to his feet, with a hoarse cry ;

Elizabeth burst into tears ; Geraldine sprang forward and sank down beside her husband's couch ; of all the four people whom this apparition surprised, only the new claimant to the title retained his self-possession. He grew white, his eyes travelled stealthily from door to window ; but neither passage was free ; and he turned towards the new-comer and looked at him defiantly.

"Do you mean to deny," he began coolly, "that I am Sir Charles's legitimate son, and consequently the lawful possessor of the title?"

"No," answered James, who could not face him, but stood nervously shifting his hands and his feet, and glancing restlessly about him, "I—I don't deny it. I only deny that I ever committed a murder or betrayed another man's wife—and—God forgive you for—for all you have made me suffer!"

He sank down into the nearest chair, utterly overcome, and, turning his head away, let it rest upon his hands, unable to bear the sight of the friend he had trusted almost to the death, after the sickening disclosures the last two days had made concerning him.

"I really don't understand all this ; it is a lot of infernal nonsense !" cried the new Sir James, rising coolly. "Perhaps an interview with a lawyer and another with a couple of policemen will bring the snivelling idiot to reason. In the mean time, we are intruding upon you to no purpose, Captain Morrison, and we will not further trespass upon you until I am able to prove, with the aid of Mr. Massey and my other witnesses, the truth of the statements I have made to-day."

"I want no further proof, I assure you," said Captain Morrison, whose eyes had lost their hard look for a moment as they fell upon his wife crouching beside the sofa on which he lay. "But I have something to say to you privately ; and, if you can spare me a few moments, I promise not to detain you longer." Geraldine looked up in alarm. "Mr. Fielding, I am sorry your visit should have been spoilt by this unpleasant scene. Geraldine, you will do your best to entertain your cousin and Mr. Fielding, while Sir James and I have a few minutes' conversation ; Miss Otway will help you, I am sure."

Geraldine rose obediently from her knees, and, with one faltering, imploring look at her husband, submissively left the room with the others, leaving Captain Morrison alone with the new claimant to the title of Sir James Otway. No sooner was the door closed than the latter turned defiantly towards the little man on the sofa.

“You doubt my claim, then? I tell you I can prove it,” he began, in a blustering tone.

“I do not doubt your claim. I believe—I may say I know, that without some strong support of that kind, neither you nor your tutor would have had the pluck to carry through your impudent imposture.”

“Imposture! What do you mean? I tell you I am Sir Charles’s legitimate son——”

“Of which fact you were ignorant until your present more cunning and more intelligent associate, scenting a chance of plunder, went to Ireland to see the James Otway imprisoned on a charge of murder, discovered you”—the other, moved at last, changed colour—“passed you off upon Massey, the lawyer, as your cousin, and bided his time. That time came

when you escaped from prison. The other James Otway had been lost sight of ; Lindley believed he would never return to England ; your way seemed clear. Then came your attempts to murder the man who stood in your way, by poison and by bullet ; your efforts to inflame my mind against him by rousing my jealousy as a husband, and by imputing to him the very crime of which I have called you here to accuse you. I don't know how far your venomous suggestions might have led me if my wife's frightened half-confidences, and the bold appearance of her cousin, James Otway, had not woke suspicion enough in me to send me to Enfield, where I learnt from my sister's lips that it was you for whom she was mad enough to leave her husband ; that you wearied in a few weeks of the well-bred woman your coarse nature could not appreciate ; that, seeing this, and being too proud to confess that she was not your wife, she got your namesake, whom she knew only as a frequent visitor of yours under the name of Hammond, to see her off to Enfield, where she lived with an old governess of hers until I found her out. On my

return from Enfield I went straight to Corbyn's farm, with the intention of going into an explanation with the one James Otway whom I had been pursuing for the crimes of the other. While I was waiting for him, sitting with my back to the open window in his sitting-room, in the twilight, I was shot from behind—in mistake no doubt for James Otway—by you." And Captain Morrison turned and looked straight into the face of the unabashed "Doctor Ledbury." Then he continued: "When the cry I uttered had brought in Mrs. Corbyn and her husband from the kitchen, and James Otway from the field behind the house, through which he had been slowly returning home, I had had time to decide upon a plan to clear up the mystery. I saw that the death of the innocent James Otway would be the signal for the guilty one to come forward with his crimes buried in the grave of his namesake. So I persuaded the uninjured James to remain closely hidden at the farm, proclaimed his death, and I even played the cruel trick of passing him off living for dead to his adopted sister—my wife, in order that her evidence might satisfy both you

and Mr. Fielding, your accomplice. My trick succeeded perfectly, as I think, 'Doctor Ledbury,' that you will admit. And now I have another matter to discuss with you. Your murder, your lies, your fresh attempts at murder, do not concern me, they concern the detective who has been on your track since you left this house yesterday morning, and who is now waiting outside with a cordon of police to arrest you and restore you to the seclusion you left so abruptly eight months ago." Sir James started up from the chair in which he had defiantly placed himself at the beginning of this speech, and showed his gleaming white teeth in a savage gaze at his accuser, who continued quietly—"As I said before, these trifling errors don't concern me. But you are a versatile ruffian. In the interval between escaping from prison and ousting your cousin from the inheritance your crime had forfeited, you filled up your time by making love to a married woman, and persuading her to elope with you; you took her abroad with you," continued Captain Morrison, his voice shaking in spite of himself, "passing yourself

off as Sir James Otway ; and on your return to England you deserted her, and left it to your other victim, the man you are trying to make away with, to see her safely to a place of seclusion."

"So that is your version of his share in the matter," sneered the other significantly.

"Yes. I had it from my sister's own lips the night before last. James Otway believed her to be your wife, for she was too proud to betray you. Now I have sworn to avenge my sister ; so this does concern me. If I had met you, knowing what I now do, anywhere but under my own roof, I would have shot you dead like a dog. As it is, you are a condemned man ; the police are waiting for you to leave this house to re-arrest you ; so that I cannot take advantage of you now. But I will show you a way of escape, that you may evade them and get away safely—for the present ; for I will track you down again, if I have to follow you round the world, and, when I next meet you, I will show you no mercy."

"Thanks. Then perhaps you will be so good as to fulfil the first part of your offer at



once; and, as for your kind promise to scalp me afterwards, why I'll take my chance of that."

"Go up to the top of the house and get out by the ladder on to the roof. I will have you brought down and let out as soon as it is safe."

"Thanks. Perhaps you won't mind paying beforehand for the exciting little chase of me you have promised yourself, by lending me a couple of sovereigns to help me get a fair start."

He was impudently cool as ever as he crossed the room towards the sofa, to take the money Captain Morrison held out to him. He put out his left hand to receive it, at the same moment that with his right he drew out a revolver, and pointed it with the muzzle a couple of feet from the captain's breast. But the soldier was quick of eye and sure of hand. Springing from the sofa, he seized the hand that held the revolver in both his, and forced it up at the very moment that the weapon went off. The assailant staggered, and fell to the ground without a groan or a cry, shot through the head.

Captain Morrison, drawn down by the fall of the dead man, rose with difficulty and groped

his way with slow steps to the bell ; but before he touched the handle the door opened, and James Otway came in. He had remained within hearing, having reason to mistrust his namesake's loyalty.

"Captain Morrison, he has hurt you ! I knew——" he began, and then stopped short, horror-struck at the sight of the dead man on the floor at his feet.

"It was—an accident !" gasped the other, in a weak, hoarse voice, as he reeled against an armchair, and James helped him to place himself in it. "The sight makes me sick. Will you send Johnson to take—him away—upstairs—to his father's room ? Don't let my wife know anything—yet."

A few minutes later, the three ladies and Lindley, who were in the drawing-room together, heard sounds in the hall and low voices, which alarmed them. Geraldine started up and rushed to the door ; but it had been locked on the outside. She could hear the sounds proceeding through the hall and up the staircase, and she recognized them as of the same kind as those she had heard the night before,

when her husband was brought home. Without uttering a cry, she ran across the room to the French window, opened it, and hurried to the nearest of the two library windows. Her husband was leaning back in the armchair by the fireplace, and Johnson was by his side. She tapped sharply on the glass, and the butler, at a gesture from his master, crossed the room, opened the window, and then left the library.

But the expression on her husband's face did not change as Geraldine hurried towards him and knelt down by his side. He still stared in front of him with dull, glassy eyes, and said, without looking at her, as her hands softly touched his arm—

“Why have you come? You should not have come till you were sent for. You have to hear something which will make you shudder and shrink from me; I have sent some one to break it to you; now you force me to tell it myself.”

“Nothing will make me shrink from you now, Philip,” she whispered timidly, as her clasp tightened on his arm.

He laughed harshly.

"Wait till you hear what I have done. I have killed James Otway."

As he had expected, there was only one James Otway for her. She shuddered from head to foot; but her fingers, though they trembled on his arm, did not relax their clasp.

"Well?" said he harshly.

"Well?" she echoed faintly.

"Have you forgotten the devotion for him you were always flinging in my face, your threats and bitter words and curses upon me if I should dare touch a hair of his head?"

"Philip, Philip, I am sorry—you must forget them! You are hiding something from me—you did not mean to do it—I am sure of it. I have learnt to trust you; trust me too, and tell me what you mean."

But at first he tried to speak and could not; she felt that he was trembling violently, and she saw the old fire rekindle in his eyes. After a minute's silence, he said—

"You are right; it was an accident. But I cannot prove it. We were alone together; and I shall have to fly from the police."

"Will you? When?"

"To-day. Now."

"Where shall we go?" she whispered, starting to her feet.

"'We' go!" he echoed, with a flame springing up in his dark eyes.

"Yes, yes, I will go with you, of course; and I will nurse you and devote myself to you, and try to make you forget," said she hurriedly.

"Do you mean it?" he asked, looking steadily up into her face.

"Before God I do."

"Then go; we have no time to lose. Get ready for the journey as quickly as you can, and come back here to fetch me."

"Yes; and I will order the carriage."

"Touch the bell; I will see to that. Go; make haste."

He had grown feverishly impatient; but, as she left him, he suddenly stretched out his arms as if to detain her. But she was hurrying to the door and did not see him, and he checked the impulse, and sank back again in his chair.

Ten minutes later, Geraldine came back in her travelling-dress, and found her husband in the position in which she had left him. His

eyes were closed, and he lifted his head heavily as she slipped on to her knees in front of him, and put her hands on his shoulders to rouse him.

"Philip," she whispered—"Philip! Wake up, we must be going, dear."

"Yes," said he faintly, "we must be going."

"The carriage is round, Philip—wake up, my poor boy, you will soon be all right when you get away from here."

"Yes, yes," he whispered dreamily; "I shall be all right then."

"Shall I call Johnson to help you up? We are wasting time, and——"

"No, Geraldine; I want no help to start on the journey I am going, and no company. I must go alone."

She looked into his face and understood him. With a low cry, she clung closer to him, sobbing and shuddering.

"Geraldine! My wife! Are you sorry? Thank God!"

He put his arms round her, and dropped his head on her shoulder.

"Geraldine, I swore you should be happy,

and you will. It is not your old companion James who is dead, but your worthless brother, whom you have known as Doctor Ledbury."

"What do I care? What do I care who is alive or who is dead, if you—oh, Philip, it can't be true! You are ill, but not—not dying! Why should you die? Nobody dies of a sprain!"

"No; but a man may die of a bullet through him. The man Otway, who is now dead, shot me through the back as I sat in the sitting-room at the farm yesterday, mistaking me for James, whom I was waiting for. Half an hour ago he tried to shoot me again—in my proper person this time. I threw up his hand, and the bullet passed through his head; but the tussle has set my wound bleeding, and I am done for this time. I don't mind, now I know you will be sorry. Kiss me, Geraldine."

She pressed her lips to his with quivering passion, which roused him completely from the heavy torpor into which he had been sinking, and set his pulses beating for a few moments with their old strength.

"Ah, my wife, my darling, you are giving

me back my life again!" he whispered, as he held her face between his hands and gazed into her eyes. "You couldn't love me while I lived—I was too harsh, too bad-tempered; but now you are giving me a taste of Heaven. God! to feel your lips warm at last! Kiss me again, again. Hold me closer—speak to me—I am losing you. Ah, it's—all—over!"

The last word was formed with his lips, but not uttered, for speech had left him; and the next moment, with one long, struggling, gasping breath, he lay dead in her arms.

\* \* \* \* \*

Waringham Hall sank into its old gloom on the day when its master and its guilty heir died within its walls. Lindley Fielding was too much overcome by the horrible end of his accomplice to make any attempt at flight; and, upon a promise of pardon, freely offered by the man he had done so much to injure, he confessed that, upon discovering that the James Otway imprisoned for murder was Sir Charles's legitimate son, he had formed a plot with him to trade upon that fact. It was he who had suggested the device by which the bad James



Otway, by hiding his face as if in shame on the occasion of Mr. Massey's visiting him in prison, had passed himself off as his innocent namesake on the old lawyer. He had then tracked the innocent James Otway to the Cape of Good Hope, where he was living under the name of Harry Hammond, having resolved never to return to his unsympathetic family. The reason of Sir Charles's constant aversion to the boy was alleged by Mr. Massey to have been the open satisfaction shown by his father, Sir Charles's brother, at the loss of the peasant-wife Kathleen, whose story had come to his ears.

The innocent young James Otway had married a pretty young English girl of volatile manners, who had come out to the Cape as a governess. Lindley fell in love with her, and, when he found that her husband, though weak and easily led, had ideas of honour which forbade the hope of making a bargain with him for information concerning a nearer heir to the title, he induced the flighty little creature to run away with him. It was while smarting under the loss of his wife, of whom he was then passionately fond, that James had met

Lindley on his unexpected return to the Hall on the night of his uncle's death. After that event, James had again gone out to the Cape, under the advice of his treacherous namesake, who wished to get him out of the way. He there discovered that the girl he had married, young as she was, had already been the wife of another man at the time ; he learnt later that, this first husband being now dead, Lindley had married her on his return to England.

Lindley disclaimed all participation in his accomplice's attempts to murder James. And, as the latter was inclined to believe him on this point, the unlucky conspirator received forgiveness and a small sum of money to help him back to the Cape with his wife, with an intimation that his reappearance on the shores of his native land would be ill-received. .

James's innocence being now clearly established, he had no difficulty in obtaining undisputed possession of the Waringham estate ; but the Hall, now inhabited solely by his two old aunts, the younger of whom had sunk suddenly into crestfallen insignificance, owing to her share in the late conspiracy, from which she

had always been trying to obtain some advantage, had few charms for him. And during the year following Captain Morrison's death, which Geraldine spent in complete seclusion with some relatives of her late husband's, James went abroad, and few tidings of him reached his friends in England.

Geraldine visited Waringham every month, to stand by her husband's grave, to pay dreary penitential calls upon her two old aunts, and to see the poor old housekeeper, who was now sinking rapidly into childishness. It was early in the New Year, some thirteen months after Captain Morrison's death, that on one of these periodical visits Reginald Bamber again proposed to her. She received this second offer from him more gently than she had done the first; but her answer was the same—indeed, she was rather shocked by it, and expressed a conviction that it was not right for a widow to marry again.

She was extremely sorry to have to wound his feelings, after such a display of constancy; but when, on her next visit to Waringham, a month afterwards, she learned that he was

engaged to the wealthy but plain daughter of a retired tea-merchant who had taken Admiral Stanhope's house for the summer, she could not help a slight feeling of disappointment and mortification. But Elizabeth told her he had had, six weeks ago, an opportunity of a brilliant opening in Boston which demanded capital to start with, and expressed her opinion that the young man's choice was a very sensible one. Geraldine agreed, but was wounded again.

"Six weeks ago!" she thought to herself; "and it is nearly five weeks since he proposed to me."

She had been left by her husband very well off; but she could not compete in point of wealth with the tea-merchant's daughter; therefore she ought to have felt flattered that a man in every way so estimable as Reginald Bamber should have given her the preference.

"I suppose you have heard that James has come back," continued Elizabeth.

"No, I had not. When did he come?" asked Geraldine, without showing any particular interest.

"Only last night, and he went away again this morning. I told him you were coming to-day; but he said he didn't suppose you had any wish to see him, and he had business in town."

"Very civil of him, certainly! I dare say widows are not lively enough society for him."

When she rose to take leave, she remembered that she had not paid her usual visit to the conservatory, where her old friends the flowers were not quite so carefully tended as during her reign at Waringham. She went by herself, for Elizabeth, who had aged lately, was now as much averse to exertion as her sister. Geraldine stopped short on the threshold, for in her old American chair sat James Otway. He jumped up and shook hands with her cheerfully.

"How are you? So glad to see you! Thought I should be back in time to say 'How do you do?' before you went."

"I'm very glad to see you. I hear you only arrived last night. Where did you come from?"

"From Paris last. It's very cold there—awfully cold, in fact."

"Is it really? What sort of passage did you have?"

"Oh, beastly. I sat on the upper deck with my back to the funnel, scorched on one side, and frozen on the other!"

They both laughed constrainedly, and Geraldine turned back towards the dining-room, expecting him to take the natural course of accompanying her to the entrance. But he did nothing of the kind; she heard that he was not following her, and was indignant at this strange lack of courtesy. At last, most unwillingly, she looked round when she was half across the room, and saw that his hands were pressed tightly in each other, and that he was watching her with an expression which moved her out of her composure. She came slowly back to the conservatory door, and, offering her hand, said—

"Good-bye!"

But he sprang forward and held her fast, with his arm round her waist.

"No, no, Deldee; don't say that, for

Heaven's sake, don't! I love you so. Don't you care a bit about me?"

"James, James, how can you ask me? Don't you know—don't you know? I don't remember the time, since I first went to Havre, when I have not thought more about you than about any one in the world. Heaven forgive me, James; I have loved you more than I ought!"

"And you will be my wife, Deldee, as you promised more than twenty years ago?"

"Yes."

And so, twenty-one years after his first proposal, James Otway gained the wife whom he had carried off to Waringham, as a little abandoned waif of three years old; and the Deldee who cheered his boyhood and rescued him from the dangers of his manhood is his good fairy still.

They live at Waringham, and they are very happy, as people should be who have gained their heart's strongest desire. But sometimes, now that the storms of anxiety for the man she loves have been succeeded by the calm of peaceful life with him, thoughts

of fiery Philip Morrison, with his passions and his prejudices, his sullen voice and his wistful eyes, crowd into Geraldine's mind with new significance. She has been true, with consistency beyond the reach of softer, weaker women, to the one love of her life; and all which that love could give her is hers. But a dim question rises in her mind with the memory of Philip: she is wise enough not to try to answer it; it is better for her not to think that the love to which she shut her heart was the best, and that the deepest tenderness she was ever to inspire was that which burned in the dark eyes of the dead man whose yearning gaze will never meet her own again.

THE END.





